

# Summer Literary Issue



PHOTO BY PAMELA GERAR

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# The Best of Three Worlds

Judging the more than 200 entries in this year's *Voice Literary Contest* was sometimes daunting, but never boring. We read, sorted, and re-read—argued and advocated right up until the deadline for calling the winners in late July. During the process, we each had peak experiences as readers. We felt honored that so many fine writers had shown us their work, and the task of choosing finalists was difficult. We hope you will find the following pages valuable—as we did. Our judges for fiction and non-fiction were *Voice* writers Jim Christie and Denise Minor, Editor Jane Underwood, and Editor-in-Chief Sarah Smith. Judging poetry were Co-Publishers Jack Tipple and Sarah Smith. Photos for the literary section were provided by Pamela Gerard, a regular *Voice* contributor for the past eight years. And a new page design was crafted by Sarah Smith with help from typographer Neal Elkin and designer Suzanne Scott. You are invited to attend our party at Cover to Cover Booksellers, 3910 24th Street, on Friday, August 4, from 7 to 9 p.m., when many of the writers published in this issue will read their work. We hope to see you there. ♦

## Poetry

### Susan Dambroff, "School Bus Driver," Honorable Mention

Susan Dambroff won first prize in the California State Poetry Society Contest last year, and was also awarded an honorable mention in the *Bay Guardian's* 1995 Poetry Contest. A collection of her poetry, *Memory of Bone*, has been published by Black Oyster Press. For the past nine years, she has worked as a special education teacher at Yerba Buena Children's Center. A twenty-year expatriate from the suburbs of New York, Dambroff now lives in the Castro District with her partner of eleven years, a San Francisco school bus driver.

### Barbara Lewis, "Time Exposed," Second Place

Barbara Lewis was born in New York City but was "forcibly removed" at the age of one when her family relocated to Chicago. She returned to New York "as soon and as often as I could," until moving to San Francisco in 1959. "Time Exposed" is Lewis' first published poem, although she once won an honorable mention in a 7-Up jingle contest (she rhymed *teddy bear* and *Medicare*). By day Lewis edits copy for *PC World*. By night she improvises theater with Bay Area Theatersports, or improvises reality in the Noe Valley home she shares with her husband, Bob, and their two dachshunds.

### Jody Mahoney, "White's Ferry," Third Place

Jody Mahoney was born in Washington, D.C., and raised in Maryland, one of five daughters. In addition to being a published writer and poet, she is "a very distant cousin to Thomas Jefferson and J.E.B. Stuart, the confederate general, so my ties to the region are strong." Married to a native San Franciscan, and the mother of a five-year-old son, she has lived in San Francisco since 1976. Mahoney received her B.A. from Antioch University and is currently a graduate student in creative writing.

### Eileen Malone, "These Things, That Others May Call Miracles," Honorable Mention

Eileen Malone is first and foremost a poet, "but I write freelance and teach to make enough money to support my poetry habit." She recently won first prize in the 1994 Emily Powell Literary Memorial, one of New York's premier poetry competitions. Twenty years ago she moved from the city's Excelsior District to the coastal fog of Colma, where she is currently "working day and night, night and day," revising the manuscript for her book, *The Complete Guide to Writers' Groups, Workshops and Conferences*, to be published this spring by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

### Whitman McGowan, "Music Critic," Honorable Mention

Whitman McGowan is the author of a 1994 book of poems, *Contents May Have Shifted*, illustrated with cartoons by Oregon artist Momo. He moved to San Francisco from Pasadena ten years ago, and currently manages an apartment building "on the edge of a very nice neighborhood" (Pacific Heights). The poem "Music Critic" was inspired by a night at Cafe Babar when McGowan was filling in behind the bar. "There was this lady who complained about the tape I had chosen for the house music. I thought she was saying she didn't like the jazz of Archie Shepp, but there was actually something wrong with my tape."

### Zack Rogow, "Still Life with History," Honorable Mention

Poet Zack Rogow works as an editor and teacher in the School of Education at U.C. Berkeley. He and his wife, Anne Sachs, have two daughters, ages six and two, and have lived in Noe Valley since 1987. In 1993 the California Arts Council awarded Rogow a year-long creative writing fellowship in poetry. Last year he won a PEN/Book-of-the-Month Club prize for his translation of *Earthlight*, a book of poems by French writer André Breton.

### Nancy Sully, "H Peregrino," Honorable Mention

Nancy Sully is originally from Hingham, Massachusetts, but has been living in Palo Alto since 1951. Over the years she has contributed poems to literary magazines on both coasts, notably *Matrix*, a feminist journal prominent in Palo Alto. She holds a master's in creative writing from San Francisco State University, and has taught a poetry course called "Imagination Stretching." Now "semi-retired," Sully has four grown children and three grandsons and runs a writing and editing service out of her home.

### Sarah Van Arsdale, "Molecular Diffusion in the AIDS Ward," First Place

Sarah Van Arsdale's first novel *Toward Amnesty* will be published in January by Riverhead Books, a division of Putnam. Since earning her MFA at Vermont College, she has published poems in several literary magazines and anthologies, and she is currently working on her second novel. Van Arsdale holds down jobs as a curatorial assistant in the Birds and Mammals Department at the California Academy of Sciences and as an editorial assistant at U.C. San Francisco. She lives in the Castro, but has been known to frequent Martha and Brothers coffeeshop on 24th Street.

## Non-Fiction

### Alice Wirth Gray, "Pre-Shrunk," Honorable Mention

Alice Wirth Gray published *What the Poor Eat*, a book of poetry, in 1993, but decided to send the *Voice* a first-person essay instead of a poem, "because non-fiction contests are unusual, and I thought I'd like to write something humorous." A 40-year resident of Berkeley, Gray lives and works with her husband Ralph Gray, an architect and structural engineer. The Grays have two grown daughters, one a computer scientist and the other a painter, "and they're both taller than I am!"

### Kathryn Guta, "Flying with Melanoma," Honorable Mention

Kathryn Guta has been a resident of Noe Valley for fifteen years and a primary care nurse at San Francisco General Hospital for the past nine. She teaches stress reduction classes at S.F. General, California Pacific Medical Center, and the California Institute of Integral Studies. She also attends a women's writing circle led by Linda Elkin. Guta is pleased to report she is currently cancer-free.

### Mim Locke, "Death at the Ranch," Honorable Mention

Mim Locke lives and works at the Martin de Porres soup kitchen at the foot of Potrero Hill in the Mission District. She started writing a year and a half ago, "chronicling some of my family's stories, which my cousins and I hope to put together in a collection some day." For the past six months, she has been taking a writing class with author Jewelle Gomez at Brava! for Women in the Arts.

### Ed Menendez, "A Smoker's Dilemma," First Place

Ed Menendez ("no relation to the Menendez brothers") is an El Sobrante resident who has done considerable writing since he graduated from U.C. Berkeley in 1994, but his essay "A Smoker's Dilemma" is the first piece he has submitted for publication. A retired New York City phone company employee, Menendez moved to California in 1992 after visiting friend Judith Sundstrom (our third-place non-fiction winner). "I fell in love with the Bay Area," he says. "It's livable, which New York isn't, unless you have scads of money."

### Carol Ormandy, "A Match Made in Graceland," Honorable Mention

San Mateo resident Carol Ormandy hails from Deerhorn, Michigan. She moved to San Francisco in 1973 and has lived on the Peninsula since 1979. Ormandy has had one other non-fiction work published, "an essay about my grandma's house," in a textbook of cross-cultural readings for writers. She also won first place in a poetry contest while attending community college. She has a twenty-two-year-old son, works as an au pair coordinator, and continues to be married to Phil.

### Salve Real, "The Strange New World of San Francisco," Second Place

Salve Real came to the United States from the Philippines nine years ago at the age of twenty. She has written articles about life in the Philippines for *Asian Week* and the *Philippine News*. Real lives with her husband on Nob Hill, and will graduate from the nursing program at City College this December. In addition to nursing, she plans to continue writing about Filipino culture. Her mother, who arrived in San Francisco seven months ago, recently celebrated her sixtieth birthday.

### Judith Sundstrom, "Tools and Other Methods," Third Place Non-Fiction

El Sobrante resident Judith Sundstrom spent the first twenty-two years of her life in New York and the next twenty-two in California. As a nonpracticing lawyer with writing aspirations and the mother of a twenty-year-old son who has flown the coop, she says, "I'm a middle-aged runaway trying to reinvent myself." Unlike her mother, she adds, "I do a lot of repair work around the house and love it."

### Mike Underhill, "Toots and Harry," Honorable Mention

Mike Underhill is an attorney who practices environmental law with the U.S. Department of Justice. A former history major at U.C. Berkeley, he says his family "came from Illinois over the Lassen Trail by covered wagon in 1864, and we've lived in California ever since." Mike and his wife Marsha Underhill purchased the Axford carriage house on 25th Street in 1983, but Mike didn't encounter his ghost until 1987, when the couple moved into the main house. "After those four times in '87, I haven't seen hide nor hair of him since."

## Fiction

### Kristin Anundsen, "Small Things," Honorable Mention

Kristin Anundsen grew up in Minnesota and New York, but she has lived in San Francisco off and on since 1960. For the past fourteen years, she's been a resident of 27th Street. Anundsen makes her living as a ghost writer ("I just collaborated on a book called *Nobody's Victim*, about how to wean yourself of therapy and recovery"). In 1993, she co-authored a handbook called *Creating Community Anywhere*, but her fiction piece "Small Things" is "the first short story I've written since I was a teenager. The people in my writing group helped with the story a lot."

### David Bolle, "Today My Friend," Honorable Mention

A writer of songs and stories, David Bolle has been a denizen of Noe Valley for fourteen years. In his free time he works in the field of electronic design. Although he regularly sends his writing out to friends, "Today My Friend" is his first published work.

### Carolyn Brown, "Thunderstorms," Honorable Mention

Eight-year San Francisco resident Carolyn Brown writes a monthly column on political and social issues for the *Marina Times*, a neighborhood newspaper similar to the *Voice*. These days she is also busy working on a novel, *Nugget*, about a young chef who moves to San Francisco and discovers an unlikely friendship with her estranged grandmother. She was born and raised in Philadelphia.

### William Carty, "Ahora Soy Tan Feliz," Second Place

William Carty is a Mission District visual artist and poet who moved to San Francisco from Connecticut twenty years ago. His second-place entry was his first attempt at writing fiction. "It's a composite of family and friends, plus invention, intended as a celebration of our life in the Mission," said Carty. "Ahora Soy Tan Feliz" also won third place in the *Bay Guardian's* 1995 Fiction Contest, but the story is published here for the first time.

### Nona Caspers, "My Job," Third Place

Nona Caspers teaches creative writing at San Francisco State University. Her novel, *The Blessed*, was published in 1990 by Silverleaf Press. In July 1995 she received the Joseph Henry Jackson Literary Award for short-fiction-in-progress from California Intersection for the Arts. Caspers, a native Minnesotan and a San Francisco resident since 1990, is currently finishing a master of fine arts degree at San Francisco State University.

### Cantara Christopher, "Salamat So Long," Honorable Mention

Cantara Christopher is a writer living in San Francisco.

### Carol Cowen, "A Rat in Shiny Black Shoes," First Place

Carol Cowen majored in English at Indiana University and taught English in Japan from 1987 to 1989. Her flight back to San Francisco on October 17, 1989, was the first international flight allowed to land at SFO following the Loma Prieta Earthquake. A former Glen Park resident, she now lives with her husband Carl Moller in Kelseyville, where she works as a children's librarian. Cowen won second prize in a 1994 *Writer's Digest* short-story competition. She won a scholarship to attend the 1995 Squaw Valley Writers Conference, and is working on a collection of stories titled *Somewhere in Western Japan*.

### Douglas A. Konecky, "The Tropical Bakery," Honorable Mention

Douglas A. Konecky is a freelance songwriter who has penned lyrics for country music stars Barbara Mandrell, Glen Campbell, and Tanya Tucker. He has two children, ages twenty and eleven, and moved with his wife and daughter from Los Angeles to Noe Valley two years ago. "The Tropical Bakery" is the fourth in a series of "bakery stories" Konecky is writing. He also just completed his first novel.



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# A Rat in Shiny Black Shoes

Carol Cowen

I DRINK BARLEY TEA from a small porcelain cup with a golden rim, translucent spots, and tiny red crickets painted on the bottom. I fill the cup again and again, smelling the cedar cork each time I remove it from its wicker thermos. The steaming contents of the thermos heat the cork, and a strong, rich aroma floods my face. As I inhale, I see an image of mist swirling around the tops of tall eucalyptus trees. Their leaves snap in the wind, filling the air with a musty, old-house smell. Tall cedars with spiky black arms loom in the fog, and for a moment I am transported back to my Northern California life, thousands of miles away and not so long ago.

Hidden pleasures like cork sniffing take up my days and nights, and make my solitary life more interesting than I would have ever thought possible. I sit in an empty room smiling at myself. I do not actually see the smile. I feel it in the tautness of my cheeks and the crinkles around the edges of my eyes.

Wry thoughts make me smile. Wry thoughts in Japanese and English, thoughts with no need of being pronounced perfectly. I wonder if my students also have such thoughts.

Many Japanese say to me, "But you are like Japanese. You seem like Japanese." I want to say, "But of course, I am, because of my Japanese lover." I want to say this, but I don't, although the thought makes me smile in empty rooms and on local trains that chug and toot their way through the Japanese countryside.

I am fascinated by these trains — especially the limited express trains which stop for only seconds at the small city where I live. A few minutes before the train's arrival I position myself at track's edge, the tips of my shoes touching the edge of the yellow-lined platform. I peer down the track and watch for the light. As it approaches I prepare myself for the long, slender cream-and-maroon-colored train. It is sleek and glides up to me silently. My body contracts and tingles at the sight of this train, and in the first few minutes of my ride I feel as flushed as if I had just been with my lover. With such thoughts I smile to myself on the train and now, to myself, in the empty room.

I think of my students and of teaching, although in Japan I don't exactly teach, I occupy classrooms for short periods of time. The adult students are tired and shy, and I put them in small groups so they relax into English. When they fall back into Japanese I chide them, saying "English only." I move among the groups and hear one of them say in Japanese, "Watch out. Here comes 'English only.'"

I think of the shuffle-shuffle of the school manager's slippers. Whenever she wants something, I hear the clink of tea-cups and her slippered steps coming toward me with tea and requests. I think of walking through her carpeted school wearing shoes, but then I remember her afternoon ritual of hand-washing dozens of pairs of pale-pink slippers, and I feel guilty for the unkind thought. She is good to me. When I return to school she will smile and say, "*O hi sashi buri, Joanna-san.*"

"*O hi sashi buri.*" Long time, no see. The words sit on me, asking me to use them. To my lover I would say these words, now, if I saw him, but I won't. He is some-

where in western Japan, being a rat. He is a businessman in Hong Kong—tailored suits, but to me he is a rat in shiny black shoes.

IN THE EMPTY ROOM the memories return, overtaking the wry thoughts. I feel my smile beginning to droop. The sadness comes, seeping into my eyes and making them dull and narrow, as if weighed down by two small lumps of *mochi*.

I see black pine trees and frozen brown fields fringed by a gray, white-rimmed Sea of Japan. It is January on a drizzly, cold Sunday morning, in a love hotel hidden in the forest on the mountain. My lover has driven us into a one-car garage, from which we enter the hotel room directly.

I think it's our own private domain until the maid appears from the bathroom, a kerchief around her head and a plastic sack in her hand. Though the sheets are fresh, the bed is still warm from the heat of the previous hour's lovers.

like a chart of beef cuts that hangs on the wall of the butcher shop near the school where I teach. To strangers he will say, "How old do you think she is? Does she look 30? How old?"

On that Sunday morning we soaked in a bath as large and white as a beach. While the steam misted and quivered on our bodies I taught him "This Little Piggy." While we made love without a condom he taught me the phrase *daijobero*. No problem. *Daijobero*. No problem. No problem for him, but if *daijobero* were true, my story would have a different outcome.

I am not Japanese. I am not Japanese. I chant these words to myself every day in a kind of incantation. Even though I have spent long evenings in friends' homes and listened to their hearts, as they say, I am not one of them. I want to be, sometimes.

In coffee shops I study the women's magazines and their make-over pictures. I look at the pictures of women with scant eyebrows and pale skin and scrutinize how they put on their makeup to create their faces. Then I understand my lover's amazement at me. "This is how you look after a bath — no makeup and so beautiful! You have eyebrows."

*Wakarimashita*. I understand.

At seasonal festivals in Osaka and inside famous Kyoto temples I look at the "foreign" westerners and dissociate myself from them. They all seem disheveled and sloppy. In the winter they are overstuffed in down jackets and mufflers and wool hats, and in the summer they seem naked in

"O hi sashi buri."

*Long time, no see.*

*The words sit on me, asking me to use them.*

*To my lover I would*

*say these words, now,*

*if I saw him, but I*

*won't. He is somewhere*

*in western Japan,*

*being a rat.*

alcove, but the room is from an Asian museum that I can never occupy.

To my Western friends I tell my story this way, animated, as if I didn't have a care in the world...

"HE was the one who said *daijobero* while not using a condom. *Daijobero!*"

"Why didn't you argue?" my friends ask. "How could you be so stupid?" glares from their faces.

NOW I AM ALONE in Osaka, waiting for the doctor and his black bag, while my lover stays at home in his country town, his black shiny shoes sitting on



Later, when we leave the room, my lover wraps my scarf around me and says, "I must take care of you, because you are older than me."

For him, age is an obsession. When we celebrate our birthdays, they are one decade apart. I don't mind being older, but my age seems to scare him.

Each time he sees me, I am a different age. Different parts of me have different ages. Sometimes I feel him looking at me

short-shorts and tank tops. I regret being one of them.

When I see mixed couples, usually Western men with Japanese women, they look mismatched. I watch my lover's face watching them. His eyes find mine. Do we look like them? We wonder. We don't speak.

I am not Japanese. Living here, I have had a glimpse into a serene room with delicately curved hamboo windows, sliding paper doors, and exquisite *ikebana* in the

the polished wood entry of his mother's house. He is cushioned by four hundred years of tradition in his "high" house. "House marries house," he told me. "You have no house."

"Why are you waiting? Why are you alone?" my friends ask. I say, "No one can know. It's better this way."

It's better this way, I tell the empty

*continued next page*



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room. The late afternoon sun burns through the paper-screened door, and shadows from a branch-filled vase silhouette the screen and spill onto the *tatami* floor.

It's better this way. He smokes. The conversations we had were oblique. He would visit the school, sometimes hung over and looking bad. I would ask, "Why do you do this?" and he would say, "I don't know." Even if we had the same language, I sensed no more words would be spoken. I wondered, and he didn't know.

*Between us were secrets  
and long nights. After the  
school closed at nine o'clock  
we would meet in a  
neighboring town, farther  
down the train line, where  
he waited for me in his  
Chrysler, smoking cigarettes  
and counting his stacks  
of yen, stashed like scratch  
paper in the glove box.*

There was, though, a feeling between us. It connected us at odd moments, when standing on a busy street corner, or sitting in an empty classroom in the middle of a sunny afternoon, his pearl-gray silk suit stuffed in a student chair, the sun glinting off his black hair and those shiny black shoes. "Teach Miki," he would say, his pale round face smooth and grinning up at me.

On the first day of spring he appeared with a soft breeze, holding red roses wrapped in pink-and-white department store paper. "I will take you to lunch," he said, "a long lunch at the best French restaurant with white wine to drink and

chocolate *gateau* for dessert."

"A teacher doesn't drink at lunch," I said. But I did drink, seduced and intrigued by the tiny French cafe perched on the second story of a boutique of all black clothes, twenty or thirty suits floating around the shop, on mannequins with no heads.

Between us were secrets and long nights. After the school closed at nine o'clock we would meet in a neighboring town, farther down the train line, where he waited for me in his Chrysler, smoking cigarettes and counting his stacks of yen, stashed like scratch paper in the glove box.

On moonless nights we held hands and walked along willow-lined canals to whiskey bars where hostesses showed us their teenaged daughters' pictures and told us that no one must know that this is where they worked, that we must keep their secret. Old geishas slumped drunk as they hewed us out the door. These sights were forbidden for me the foreigner to see, but he wanted to show me. The power of this secret was more thrilling than sex.

In an ice-cold movie theater in the middle of a steamy afternoon we said goodbye. We watched a Walt Disney movie and ate popcorn and ice-cream bars, while I shivered and he wrapped me in his silk suit jacket. I hoped to leave it with chocolate smears and butter stains, instead of tears. He touched his hand to my stomach and said *akachan* as he handed me a bundle of yen for the Osaka doctor. I didn't know the word *akachan*; at that moment I only wanted to be home in my own apartment with my maroon leather pocket dictionary. I wanted to be alone with the words on the fragile, gold-rimmed pages.

I hold the dictionary in one palm now, its soft small cover protecting thousands of words. *Akachan*, "baby," "little red one." I trace the *kanji* and *hiragana* characters of the word *akachan* on the table, dipping my left forefinger in the tiny cup of cool barley tea. The pale brown slashes and loops bleed onto the white wood table.

Slowly, I move from feeling to thought. My mind searches for one wry thought, and I remember... *Daijoho*. Soon the *akachan*, the baby, will be *daijoho*. ♦

## First Place Poetry

### Molecular Diffusion in the AIDS Ward

Above the waxy petals, pink-tipped, white  
between perianth and pistil, anther  
and stamen, in ridges or in hollows  
we can't see the scent molecules gather,  
cluster together, membrane to membrane,

until the corolla's terrible burst  
when they rush out at last, sweeping the air  
with their unmistakable burning scent  
making you, in your bed, remember smoke  
curling from a hearth fire under bright stars,  
remember ironing your blue plaid shirt,  
blowing out the party candles at dawn.

How steadily the scent molecules move  
toward any air where they still don't exist,  
drifting into the hospital's tight corridor  
filtering out ammonia and bleach and disease,  
diffracting around the shut window glass,  
propelled by their own force of loneliness  
dispersing into the bright city wind,  
scattering above the square fenced yards  
chantelling as they hit blue atmosphere  
freighting the sky with Canada lily  
kiting up toward equilibrium.

Sarah Van Arsdale

## Second Place Poetry

### Time Exposed

TIME EXPOSED: AUGUST 1939

On a day late in summer a dog and a child pose low on a lawn.  
The dog's name is Kim, for some unknown reason,  
a gift from grandparents to soften loss.  
He's a serious dog, not much fun.  
Looks to those who feed him, shakes off the child.  
Her name is Billy, spelled with a y. Father wanted a son.  
Soon he'll marry the lady with the big hands who doesn't like dogs.  
Kim will go to live with a butcher (lucky dog).

Meanwhile, the radio pumps baseball into the afternoon.  
Thin sun aches everywhere.  
Time stretches flat.

TIME EXPOSED: JULY 1944

Looks innocent enough — a man and a woman, man and wife,  
beginning to look alike.  
A handsome couple, they lean toward each other,  
smile easily for the camera.  
But look again.

That lipstick mouth spits venom.  
Folded in her lap are the rawboned hands that squeeze  
and leave marks.

The man does her bidding,  
anything to please.  
Shops for groceries, helps devastate as needed,  
pumps new babies into the queenly vagina.

Quite an efficient pair, those two.  
In a few years they'll get cancer,  
together,  
the way they do everything.

Look closely. You can see the sinister cells  
just beginning to form,  
right at the corners of the eyes.

Strange how things work out.

TIME EXPOSED: MAY 1971

Sheltered against you as the earth turns into spring, I breathe peace.  
Beyond, green coastal mountains.  
Here the sun, the petal trees. Luminous wind moves overhead.

Below, in the milksweet bedroom of our home, tucked into the hill,  
babies slumber, doing their work, becoming.

Later, bees will come to drown in the apple juice,  
Mountains burn to crust.

It's all organic.

Barbara Lewis



# A Smoker's Dilemma

Ed Menendez

I AM perpetually amused by the extent to which the public debate over smoking is carried out in a tone of high moral dudgeon, as though smokers were on a par with NAMBLA members, only smellier. The idea that smokers can be shamed into quitting isn't so much wrong as it is spectacularly obtuse, like telling lemmings that suicide is a sin.

The truth is, anybody who's still smoking at this point has about the same degree of choice as a passenger in a falling plane. It's too late to decide you shouldn't come aboard, and there's no place else to go.

I recently enrolled in a stop-smoking clinic operated by a hospital in the Napa Valley. Or as I like to think of it, I agreed to pay \$2,500 for the privilege of allowing a bunch of strangers to deprive me of cigarettes, caffeine, and red meat for seven days. The notion of charging \$2,500 for the service seemed like an effective tactic, the idea being that with the stakes so high, my motivation to succeed would equal my fear that my wife would kill me if I didn't. But the addition of coffee and beef to the interdict seemed gratuitous, like telling a convict that he had to give up cigars and vanilla milkshakes along with his fondness for kiting checks in order to be paroled.

I suppose it didn't make a difference, though. Once they took away both my cigarettes *and* my coffee, I slept through nearly the entire experience and hardly noticed the absence of meat. Misery can only be multiplied so far. Beyond a certain point, the body just pretends to be dead and waits for better days.

The clinic was scheduled to begin on the 17th of February, and I was informed by the packet that arrived in the mail that I would "graduate" on the 24th. Along with a map and some helpful information ("Smoke more before quitting—this overkill may spoil your taste for cigarettes"), the packet contained the usual medical history forms and something called "A Decisional Balance Sheet," which asked me to list five reasons for quitting as well as five reasons for continuing to smoke.

Clearly, I was supposed to learn from this exercise that all reasons for smoking are spurious, but I found the simple-mindedness of the tactic infuriating, and had to suppress the urge to write "I am a bad boy"



*Misery can only be multiplied so far. Beyond a certain point, the body just pretends to be dead and waits for better days.*

500 times in response. But since this was serious business, I tried to treat it with as much respect as I could muster. So under reasons to smoke, I wrote: "Helps butn up anger," and "Shows contempt for the sniveling, pantywaist rule-followers." Under reasons to quit, I cited: "Makes life easier in depraved, puritanical, sanctimonious nonsmoking world."

These are true answers — however

much good they do me. My experience of rehab clinics, which is more considerable than I'd like, suggests that such blasts of honesty are generally treated as though they had been spoken in a foreign language, preferably a dead one. At the alcohol rehab from which I "graduated" some years ago, the social worker taking my history read from her forin, "What do you wish for?" When I replied, "A brass liver," she stuck her finger in her ear to clear it before moving on to the next question.

I DON'T SEEM to have much luck (or patience) with the kinds of "affirmative" therapies that are in vogue these days. Before I enrolled in the stop-smoking clinic, I tried a hypnotherapist. When my habit proved impervious to her arts, she suggested that perhaps if we spent a few ses-



sions talking about my problem, it would put me in a frame of mind more amenable to quitting. In the process of seeking this amenable frame of mind (a mythical creature apparently related to the unicorn), I told her about my fear of driving over Bay Area bridges. I guess she decided I needed validation, because she shared a fear of her own: she was terrified of stopping her car under an overpass, since in an earthquake it might fall down and squash her. I hadn't ever thought about the overpasses, but I immediately recognized the legitimacy of her observation: the overpasses, like the bridges, were clearly deathtraps to be avoided at all costs.

I don't get out much anymore. But at least I've been able to disqualify hypnotherapy—along with gum, hole punchers, patches, plastic cigarettes, and acupuncture—as a potential cure for smoking.

In case you think I'm some kind of incorrigible reprobate, let me emphasize that I believe completely that smoking is both deadly and vile. I am tortured by the knowledge that my vice is shortening the lives of my loved ones, not to mention my own.

I watched my father, a smoker all his life, spend his last years unable to walk across the living room without pausing to rest. He died on St. Patrick's Day, attached

to a respirator, suffocating slowly. That experience actually did inspire me to quit for about a year. But it seems that, in my case, cell-memory functions more powerfully and effectively than whatever it is that goes on in my brain. So while the memory of my father's death faded, the memory of smoking remained fresh and appealing.

By now, it should come as no surprise that, exorbitant sums of money notwithstanding, I flunked the smoking clinic. Actually I graduated, and I have the certificates, tee shirts, buttons, and other doodads to prove it. They even gave me a water bottle with which to re-hydrate myself after "exercising away" the craving for nicotine.

But success was short-lived, and after a couple of weeks of alternately hiding under the covers or shambling around like a refugee from a zombie movie, I caved in and resumed smoking. I've been a happy, if repugnant, wretch ever since.

I suppose I shouldn't be surprised. The clinic's cheerleading approach to quitting seems about as relevant to the visceral issues of addiction as whipped cream on a bullet wound. After thirty years of public service announcements that mostly boil down to the smug observation that "you're going to die," nobody smokes lightly anymore. I go to bed every night wondering whether the spot on my lung that will ul-

timately kill me has made its appearance yet. If I could quit, I would. The truth is that the inevitable consequences of smoking make me less miserable (until they arise) than the immediate consequences of quitting. Until the therapy industry figures out how to address that dilemma, the thunder of reproach to which I'm daily subjected amounts to little more than self-serving blather.

WHEN I CONSIDER smoking as a social issue, I see devils on all sides. A society that has truly absorbed the message that tobacco kills would have banned its manufacture and use a long time ago and lumped offenders into the same criminal categories as dope dealers and crack heads. I'm not suggesting this is good social policy, merely that it is our country's chosen method for regulating hard drugs.

Yet tobacco has remained substantially exempt. We've evolved a hodgepodge of laws that permit smoking, while, perhaps in frustration at their inability to criminalize it, nonsmokers resort to vilifying smokers and herding them into pens like cattle. It seems that nonsmokers need smokers much more desperately than they need a smoke-free world. The two groups represent the yin and yang of American culture,

like the sons and daughters of immigrants who voted for Prop. 187.

The fact is that no-smoking laws have less to do with restricting smoking than with finding new ways to make money from it. The therapy industry spawned in the wake of this health crisis is a case in point. But the laws that purport to regulate smoking create potential profits as well.

Last winter, for example, when I visited the South Street Seaport—New York City's version of Pier 39—smoking was banned on the outdoor pier itself, as well as in the enclosed mall that adjoins it. But in the mall were restaurants, each of which had a bar at the edge of the mall's common thoroughfare. And each of those bars was furnished with ashtrays. The message was clear: it's not that you can't smoke in the mall, you just can't do it for free.

By contrast, the smoking sections at the Oakland Coliseum seem to be completely free—of everything, including a place to sit. (Some of them don't even have ashtrays.) I guess the management there hasn't yet realized that they can charge some of their patrons twice and look like progressives while doing so.

On the other side of the issue are the tobacco company executives, those seven or eight stooges we saw on TV during the congressional hearings not so long ago. My friend Ellen, who once threw a stuffed animal out of a window at me when she saw me smoking on her porch, recalls watching as these guys were asked whether they allowed their children to smoke. She had a hard time deciding who to hate more, the hypocrites who said that smoking was safe but didn't want their kids doing it, or the slugs who figured that encouraging their kids to smoke was a small price to pay to keep their public image consistent.

Underneath all these groups, and propping them up, are the addicts themselves, who would like either to get free of the habit or at least be allowed to indulge it in peace.

SO TRY TO KEEP a kind thought the next time you see a group of smokers huddled in the rain outside an office building. They're not the latest incarnation of the Red Menace, just people with a problem. If you're not an addict yourself, be grateful. It was only the luck of the environmental/genetic draw that spared you. To turn your good fortune into a club with which to pound others is unbecoming.

Although my dad didn't succeed in quitting smoking until it was too late, he did manage to quit drinking in his mid-forties. I managed the trick a little sooner, at the age of thirty-eight. For me, it was a decision born of sheer misery. Once it hurt more to drink than not to, quitting became as easy as pulling my hand out of the fire.

I don't know why my dad stopped drinking. I assume his reasons were similar to mine, since he remained completely unmoved through 20 years of my mother's threats to leave with us kids or, failing that, to brain him with a skillet. I conclude from this that no amount of extrinsic misery-making is likely to sway the genuine addict. (You don't know my mother.) It's also clear that the pain principle is useless when it comes to smoking. By the time smoking became more painful for my dad than not smoking, the damage was irreversible.

Given the mountain of evidence that has accumulated on the dangers of smoking, you'd think I would have made some effort to get him to quit sooner. The truth is, I never even tried. During a private moment at his funeral, I took out my AA sobriety coin and tucked it in his jacket pocket. He never went to AA, and would not have accepted the coin—or the principle it represented—if he were alive. I guess it was my way of saying that I had learned the lesson he died for. Maybe someone will do the same for me. ♦



# Ahora Soy Tan Feliz

(I'm So Happy Now)

William Carty

THE BLACK FRIJOLE pan never leaves. It lives on the back burner to the left of the ancient kettle. And very often it seems that I, Artemia Prado, am standing in my place, turning tortillas over the gas flame of a front burner. But on this occasion it makes me crazy because these tortillas are for my sister's husband whose name I wish not to speak or spit.

So now it's a chore; there is no pleasure in it. Something I could love has been ruined, like black ink dropped into a glass of agua. Now it's a gray cloud job. Mira, it's like the man himself, who once was sweet like candy and *my guapo*. Today, if you look up *pendejo* in the dictionary, you will find his picture there. Some have a talent for bright and light and sparkle like my Tia Marta entering a room. But this man my poor sister married because of her sweet tooth is El Rey of Dark and I curse him and myself for feeding his nowhere ass. But Mira, you see, he is even putting his cloud over my story.

Usually this kitchen is a room of warmth and joys and smells I cannot describe, like the little casa of my childhood, hack in my country, my other country.

I remember mi Abuela then, standing at the fire as I do now. Today my Mami and I return the love of then with our love of today, for Abuelita lives with us still. Sometimes I feel that we changed places—as I grew taller, Abuelita seemed to shrink. As she cared for me, fed me, now I try, when I mess up everything else, to be true blue to mi Abuela.

I NEVER KNEW Abuelo, my grandpa. He became an angel when I was a baby. He is a photograph on our mantel, the one Papi is turning into little by little. He is a secret friend I talk to like a prayer. They told me he held me and looked into my eyes. I can close my eyes and see the look on his face in that photograph.

It makes me think of Abuelita and how was her life with him?—the man in the photograph the color of tea who looks like my Papi of today, so that I can't imagine that one was older, one was father of the other, one held a tiny hand in the tree-root photograph hands.

When I speak at night to him like a secret prayer, there is something—the rustling of leaves or quivering candle sound, which I know is his secret whisper back to me. If you could see his photograph, he has a quiet smile. If he is like a second Papi, he's the one who never gets loud.

Yes, my flesh-and-blood, living-color Papi is a horse of a different color. When the goat voice of Beny Moré parts the air,

when Papi drinks and tries to dance with everyone. A few times a year Mami surrenders and half smiles like a queen, like she is somewhere else distant as she glides smooth and effortlessly while Papi cranks away like a dancing octopus, almost to squeeze life. He knows for certain that he is a great dancer though no one can dance with him, though he never notices. Just hold on for the ride. Without a doubt they're cracking up before long. And at that moment no one can resist, men or women, to fall in love with him. That is my Papi. And be sure of one thing—he has no quiet smile. His smile is a trumpet, not a rustling leaf. He is in color for sure.

HOW CAN IT BE that some people can he bright trumpets and others can be gray wet clouds?

When the world is in love with my dancing Papi, no one is more in love than my sister. Who is always the next dancer after Mami? Who will keep going, with hands locked around his neck?

It's very strange to me, to think that this girl chose a cloud husband. In a magazine the writer said many women marry their father, but they don't know my sister. No way they ever saw her dance with Papi, as he sang along "Ahora soy tan feliz" with his beloved patron saint Beny Moré in our happy kitchen with even the pots smiling. At those times the hot tortillas jump their own little dance from one palm to another. They are not like turning over rocks. No, my sister married something else that is a mystery to me.

When people are falling asleep in their chairs or laughing their way out the kitchen door as the evening ends, Papi tells them just as he does after singing "Ahora soy tan feliz"—"Life is short." As they fade into the indigo night, released from the warm *abrazo* of our kitchen glow, to the glow of the pumpkin moon—"Life is short." If everybody had a bumpersticker, that one would be his.

"LIFE IS SHORT" makes me think of mi Abuelo, now an angel. Young people, they say in magazines, don't think about life and death, but they don't know me. Mi Papi sometimes adds "We have today," and maybe he thinks of this as he's squeezing life in our laughing kitchen.

If it is short, what do I do with my today? That is my thought. My Papi, Mami, sister? I think—how can I make even pots smile? Maybe it is I, Artemia Prado, standing at my front burner, listening for rustling leaves, turning rocks till they begin to dance from palm to palm. ♦

## White's Ferry

Without memory  
of which side of the river we stood—  
I remember the clang  
of the bell we rang to beckon the ferryman:  
brass, anchored on a rusty hook  
against the side of a shack;  
my father's broad hand curled  
around the rope as he drew it toward  
his chest, the bell sound rousting  
a thrush out of maples beyond the shack.

This, his Sunday surprise to me:  
flat, wooden ferry,  
truck tires lashed to three sides:  
tiller and engine mounted  
on the exposed rear. The ferryman  
eased our car onto its broad back  
atop the Potomac, churning and brisk,  
as the riverhank mingled with bare root,  
and early wisteria slapped  
amethyst across the bitter landscape.

Midlife stranger to his five daughters,  
he chose the only free day  
between three jobs, to know me:  
grey suited, cigarette in one hand  
resting next to the yellow tulle skirt  
of my Christmas dress, its black velvet bodice  
embroidered with small bluebirds; hair  
fisted in hurtful braids up the back of my head:  
pale, dresden sky on the eastern shore,  
fading as we crossed toward home

where a hundred years earlier,  
General Lee, father to four daughters,  
three sons, traversed this river  
torn by love so great for one place  
he renounced everything, his life  
slowly unwound to a single day  
in September: Lee's Miserables,  
they called themselves, crossed Antietam Creek  
with books, photos, flute or guitar;  
tobacco, rifles, and sabers; led

by a drummer boy whose photograph  
I bought for my son this year, in a museum;  
rough homespun jacket, each sleeve decorated—  
right arm loosely dangling, left hand resting at his belt:  
unblemished face; beautiful lips;  
pale, smooth cheeks; tufts of ragged hair  
against his ears—eyes clear, too shy  
to look directly into the lens: afraid  
of what he may see, or all that he will never see,

as if to view each memory of his brief life.  
There stands his grandfather, lanky farmer strapped  
behind a plow navigating crooked furrows  
of rock and clay. Father and brother,  
absent for so long he can't recall a face,  
but listens for their voices whenever soldiers  
pass the south fence until, one day, he bundles  
extra shoes, father's razor, photo of his mother:  
cool chickweed slows his feet as they turn,  
burnish the worn lane which flanks a nearby river.

Jody Mahoney

# My Job

Nona Caspers

I STEP OUTSIDE my kitchen door and see Cindi playing with her new doll on the side patio. Our father gave her the doll last year before he died. She changes the doll's diaper with a real diaper she used to wear. She bends over the doll, folds the diaper in half the long way, tucks in the edges. Her hair wisps up from the back of her neck.

"You have to wear a coat today," she says in a low voice. "You have to eat your food." The whole scene makes me laugh because she is three years old and can't even dress herself.

It is so hot I can feel the fluid around my brain boil. The heat makes me insane. I stand at the top of the patio steps eating my lunch. My mother is in the living room eating a cantaloupe, crying and watching soap operas. I throw a soggy green bean at my sister's head. The bean catches in the baby wisps of hair on her neck. She lifts her head, reaches one chubby arm back and brushes her shoulder. I throw another green bean and it flies over her head and lands smack on her doll's arm. She looks up and sees me. She starts to scream.

"Lori, why can't you just leave her alone," my mother yells from inside. "You're like some kind of monster." The telephone rings and she answers it.

I feel ashamed but I have gotten used to this. Shame feels the same as other emotions, like fear, or sadness, or even happiness. I do not want to be nice anymore.

"You're bad," Cindi says.  
"I know I'm bad," I say. "So what?"

I sit down with my plate and she turns so she can see me, pats the doll's head while keeping an eye on me. The honey-colored wisps of her hair fluff around her round face. I imagine she is the angel that flies to Mary and gives her the news that Jesus is coming back to save the world.

"You're selfish," Cindi says.  
"Yes, I am."

*Cindi concentrates on pulling the clothes she just put on her doll off her doll. She does this all day long, as if it were her job, on off on off, like some kind of robot. One day I gave her a shirt with a tiny neck and she tried all day to get it over the doll's fat head.*

"You're lazy."  
"Yes, I am. Lazy as a fart."

LAST YEAR I swam on the swim team and broke the 50-yard butterfly record. I used to swim across lakes in Minnesota with my Dad in a boat next to me. One arm over the other, the water gliding into my ears, the world under me dark and green. I could hear my Dad's oars whirl. Every once in a while he'd call out, How you doin? I'd lift my arm and make the OK sign, glide it back through the water, the sun all over me but never hot, my limbs clean and cool as a rock. I'd feel my heart beating in my throat, my love for my Dad beating in my throat. Mom was with Cindi on the shore, eating peanut butter on crackers and watching us disappear into the sunset.

Cindi concentrates on pulling the clothes she just put on her doll off her doll. She does this all day long, as if it were her job, on off on off, like some kind of robot. One day I gave her a shirt with a tiny neck and she tried all day to get it over the doll's fat head. Now she takes one doll arm out of its sleeve, but the other won't budge. She tugs and tugs and her lip begins to quiver like she's going to burst into tears and then it will be water all day and I'll have to rock her on my lap and it's too hot.

"Do you want some help?" I ask.  
"Go away," she says.  
"I wish I could," I say and laugh.

I sit down on the concrete next to her and take the doll. I gently ease its arm through the hole of the shirt. The plastic head and limbs are sewn on and the body is stuffed with feathers. I squeeze the doll's chest against my chest. I bounce it on my knee a few times, say "Giddyup" in a low voice. I bounce higher and higher until the doll's head and limbs fly up and snap down. I make the doll swim in the air. I know I can give her the doll now and say something nice. I think of what would surprise her most.

"Nice and soft," I say. "Cuddly." I don't want to give the doll back to her. I see across the fence between our house and the neighbors' the two girls close to my age kneeling on their backyard hill playing Chinese jump-rope. Their father sits in a yellow chair behind them.

*I chase her across the back yard, running, hunching, and even while I yell I feel the shame rise up in my throat and it feels good.*

The heat is making me dizzy. My throat is dry. I feel like my chest has been stuffed with sand, like I'm a beached carp.

I see my mother's knee pressed against the living-room picture window and it reminds me of a face pressed flat against glass.

"Let's go in the back yard."

Cindi smiles and we get up and walk around the side of the house. The grass is dry and yellow. The rabbit cage is empty because I stopped filling the rabbit's dish. I hunch down and whisper into Cindi's ear, "I hate you." She begins to run and scream.

I chase her across the back yard, running, hunching, and even while I yell I feel the shame rise up in my throat and it feels good. I imagine how we look from above, a mean thirteen-year-old girl and a baby screaming and I know this is not just a phase, that he can see that we're not OK, that we're drowning. I imagine a boat the size of Noah's ark, me in the water pulling it, and I scream I hate you at the top of my lungs. ♦

## Photographic Memories

The photos on the front cover and throughout the pages of the literary section of this edition of *The Noe Valley Voice* are part of a series of outdoor land and cityscapes by Noe Valley photographer/artist Pamela Gerard.





# The Strange New World of San Francisco

Salve Real

WHEN I FIRST arrived in America, there were many things I didn't understand. That was nine years ago, but I still remember how confused I was. Once I was going to use a stepladder and it said, "Put all four feet on ground." I said, "This is crazy. We only have two. Where's the other two?" So much to learn! My brain gets dry.

I grew up in a small barrio in the central Philippines with nine brothers and sisters. We lived in a *nipa* hut, the traditional Filipino thatched house which is raised off the ground on four tall wooden poles. My parents had a *sari-sari* store, which is like a variety store. They sold many kinds of food. Our favorite was *bangus* or milkfish, the national fish of the Philippines. We would always fight for the head and the stomach, which we considered the best parts.

Besides the store, my parents had water buffalos for plowing the field, carting water, and hauling wood. We could ride them. My father cut down small trees with a *bolo*, a long sharp knife that is used for everything — building the *nipa* hut, cleaning fish, and cutting off the heads of chickens.

On our land we had tamarind and coconut trees. We didn't have electricity or running water. My parents cooked over a wood fire. We ate everything with our hands. When we went on picnics, we would wrap the rice in banana leaves, which made it taste better. I didn't learn to use a fork until I went to Manila to live with my auntie and attend high school.

We would wash our clothes just once a month. Mum and I would take them down to the river and spend all day washing them, for ten people. When I was still a little girl, the business in our store kept getting worse. Then we had a fire and the store burned down. Our family was too poor to buy any toys for the kids. I didn't have a doll, so I took a bottle and covered it with cloth, and I talked to it like it was a baby.

In my hometown, I saw some Americans for the first time. We called them 'Kanos. At first I thought they weren't real people. When I saw them eating, I said, "Mum, look, they're eating!" I was so surprised.

Ever since I had milk in my mouth, I wanted to marry a 'Kano and go to America. It's because I have a mole on the bottom of my foot. In the Philippines there's a superstition that when you have a mole there, you will do a lot of traveling. I met

I've been living in San Francisco.

It was so hard at first. Everything is different here. For example, in the Philippines only the poor people drink fresh-brewed coffee with milk. People there prefer to drink instant Nescafe with Coffee-mate, because it's more expensive and it shows you have high class.

In the Philippines, when people get a bottle of shampoo from the United States, instead of using it, they put it on display with the bar code facing outward so people will know it is imported. Some people in my town had refrigerators and television sets just for display, even though they didn't have electricity. In the Philippines people sometimes had their good teeth pulled out and replaced with false ones, because it's considered high class for people to have metal in their mouth.

afraid of crossing the street and didn't even dare to go on the escalator, which she called "the stairs that run." Once in Manila she saw people taking money out of an automatic teller machine and was amazed. She asked me, "Why don't they take out *all* the money?"

In early 1994 I wrote to her and said I wanted to bring her to San Francisco and live with us. I called the Philippine consulate about helping us get the documents we needed, but they weren't any help. An older Filipino man came to the phone, and when I explained the problem, he said, "Why don't you ask your husband to do it for you? Why don't you hire a lawyer?" A typical Filipino attitude.

It was very hard for Mum to get the right documents because in the Philippines the people who wrote her birth certificate and marriage certificate had made a mistake and recorded different birth dates. Also, the officials there knew she had relatives in America and they made her pay a lot of money to get the documents fixed right.

MUM ARRIVED in San Francisco on December 21, 1994. In the first few days, when I saw how confused she was, I didn't think she was going to make it. She missed her children and grandchildren a lot. She kept thinking she heard her

I took her to a beauty shop and got her a haircut and a perm. Then I took her to buy clothes. She began to look much younger. We went to the Filipino senior center in the Mission District, and she met some people who spoke her language, Visayan. When we left, she brought home her half-pint of milk and her orange.

She was surprised by how many plastic bags we used and threw away. In the Philippines they keep using bags until they wear out. They recycle everything. When you return an egg carton, they give you 25 cents.

*When I came in her bedroom the morning after she arrived, I found her curled up at the bottom of the bed, against the wall, very cold. They don't have thick blankets in the Philippines, and she didn't know she was supposed to get under them.*

We passed by some homeless people and she asked where they lived. I read her articles from the newspaper to help her learn about America. There was a story about a deer that was hit by a car and people gave it four operations, but they didn't think it was necessary to help veterans who were homeless on the street. When she heard and saw things like this, she would only shake her head and say "Jesus," which in Visayan sounds like "Haysoos."

WHEN SHE HAD been here almost two weeks, my husband said she had to learn to do things on her own, so he asked her to go to the little grocery store one block away and buy a jar of instant coffee. She was very nervous about this. My husband gave her some money and made her practice saying, "instant coffee." Just to be sure, he wrote it down on a piece of paper. Then he followed her to the store but said he would not help her unless she needed it.

When they came back, he told me what had happened. Mum held out the paper to the store owner and said "coffee." But because Filipinos use a *p* in place of an *f*, it sounded like "copy." Seeing the page, and unable to read English herself, the Chinese owner thought she wanted to make a photocopy. So she took the paper and placed it face down on the photocopy machine. My Mum had never seen this kind of machine and was totally confused. So my husband had to step in and explain things.

Luckily, that was the high point of Mum's confusion. After that she started to learn things. She enrolled in English classes at Community College. She learned how to cross the street without getting run over. Now she can walk all around Chinatown and Polk Street by herself without getting lost. She knows how to shop at Walgreens and use coupons. She has learned how to call me at work on the telephone. She has started to do some babysitting for people, and she's a big help with the cooking. She makes shark so good, you'll die after you eat.

Mum still doesn't like most American food, or Italian, or Mexican. When we buy avocados, she prepares them the Filipino way, with milk and sugar. But she has found a few things she enjoys, like cappuccino, ice cream, and wine coolers. I think it will be a long time before she's completely comfortable in America. But now I know that she will make it. ♦



I WAS ALWAYS close to my Mum. I was born two months prematurely and they said I was the size of a rat. When I was a baby, I liked to sleep on top of her stomach. But when I was asleep, she would move me. I would get up in the middle of the night and sit on the floor and start crying. She would wake up and say, "I'm here."

After I got my citizenship from the United States, I wanted to bring Mum to San Francisco too. I couldn't bring her and Dad at the same time because our apartment was too small. I wanted to bring her first and then apply for him later, after she got used to this country.

She didn't want to come. She had 19 grandchildren in the Philippines, and she loves kids. Back there, when you see someone with a little child or baby, strangers come up and want to kiss it on the cheeks. I knew she would be disappointed here. But life was so hard for her in the Philippines. The only job she could get was to wash clothes for people all day, to earn enough for one kilo of rice. It made her old. She had to walk far to get the water, and the clothes were heavy. She would suffer a lot and not live long.

She never liked to go to cities. She was

daughter in the Philippines calling her.

I had forgotten how many things I had to learn when I first arrived. Mum didn't know how to use a key to open the door. When she used the telephone, she didn't know you're supposed to say hello. When I called her cousin in Georgia, I put the telephone in her hand and she just stared at it. I said, "Mum, say something!"

When I came in her bedroom the morning after she arrived, I found her curled up at the bottom of the bed, against the wall, very cold. They don't have thick blankets in the Philippines, and she didn't know she was supposed to get under them. She thought that because of the weight she wouldn't be able to breathe.

When I showed her around the city, she could never remember where to go, because all the buildings looked alike to her. I had to show her how to use a washing machine and an electric iron. In the Philippines she used an iron filled with hot charcoal.

For Christmas, we had a party with some Filipino friends. We gave her some presents, and she was very surprised. Nobody got wrapped Christmas presents in the Philippines, and she had never opened one in her life.

*In my hometown, I saw some Americans for the first time. We called them 'Kanos. At first I thought they weren't real people. When I saw them eating, I said, "Mum, look they're eating!"*

somebody who said she worked in America as a dishwasher. When I found out how much she earned I said, "I want to go to America and be a dishwasher."

In 1986 I got my wish, and since then



# Tools and Other Methods

Judith Sundstrom

I LIVE IN A large, rambling house in the El Sobrante hills. This is a good place—the middle of nowhere yet half an hour from San Francisco. I do my own painting and gardening, my husband maintains the plumbing and the roof. We keep our tools in good repair, shelved by type and size in the workshop. I am often struck by how far I have come from my roots.

Do you know the old joke that goes: How many New Yorkers does it take to screw in a lightbulb? The answer is two, one to make the martinis and one to call the janitor. This describes my parents' lifestyle perfectly. My father would have been the one making the martinis—very dry, three ice cubes, two olives—and my mother, having the superior mechanical skills, would have been the one dialing the telephone.

They were your typical intelligent, witty, urbane New Yorkers, who had both been apartment dwellers all of their lives. They had a big gray cat who had never been helnw the fourteenth floor. They never owned a houseplant.

Despite good educations and important jobs, they professed not to be able to tell one variety of tree from another. They took an almost perverse delight in not being able to build or fix anything. They were, however, known to be generous tippers, and the doorman, the elevator operator, the garageman, and the building super made sure that they wanted for nothing.

There were three tools kept in a lower kitchen drawer when I was growing up. There was a hammer for pounding picture hooks into the plaster walls, a pair of wide-mouth pliers used for twisting the tops off the olive jars, and a small screwdriver for adjusting the picture on the TV after the knobs fell off.

My brother and I were the in-house mechanics. My parents enjoyed the fruits of our labors, but they mistrusted the source. I once amazed my mother by replacing a cord plug on a favorite lamp she was about to give the super. Raising her right eyebrow, she asked me, "Is this what they teach you in the Friends School at five thousand dollars a year?"

My brother was entrusted with the high-tech jobs such as connecting up a new VCR. It was his job to install the replacement batteries in all remote control devices because only he could properly follow the plus and minus system. I could see the folks shooting glances at one another behind his back as if to say, "He must get this from *your* side of the family."

When I brought my husband into the family everyone marveled at his technical skills. They asked him to put in an answering machine for them, which was so successful that he had to put one in at their housekeeper's home the following week and one at my aunt's home the week after.

IN THEIR LATER years the folks bought a little summer house out in Westhampton Beach, and drove out there every weekend with the poor, confused cat on a leash. While the folks entertained their friends and family around the pool, an army of handymen patrolled the premises. Their personal phone book listed one service provider after another. They had a pool company, a pump company, a well com-

pany, a septic tank company, a gardener, a glazier, a painter, a roofer, and Floyd, master of all trades.

My husband and I always offered to help when we came to visit, but my parents usually declined. They reasoned that if *they* didn't enjoy working on the place, *we* wouldn't enjoy it either. So we sat around on the lounge chairs reading our books and soaking up the rays.

The beach house had come completely furnished in 1950s streamline chairs and sofas, fake Chinese black lacquered tables and lamps. The kitchen came equipped with beat-up pots and pans, Elmer Fudd and Sylvester jelly glasses, and a set of dishes with watermelon slices hand-painted on each piece. The garage came complete with washer, dryer, and a big steel toolbox.

My mother knew a good thing when she saw it and gave the toolbox a prominent position on the shelf over the washer. When a shutter came loose or a drawer got stuck, she was known to go out to the garage and stare inside the open toolbox. She seemed to be hoping that the appropriate tool would jump out of the box for her, but it rarely did, and she was usually forced to call Floyd or someone else on her list. My father made three-ounce martinis at the beach, on the theory that you can drink more at lower altitudes.

When the repairman fixed whatever was broken he would hand my father the bill and the spare parts. Pop paid the bill and always added a little extra in cash for the guy. Then he would give the parts to

Mom, who dutifully put them away in the toolbox.

One summer the folks allowed my husband to install a much-needed extension phone in the bedroom. He asked for, and was granted, use of the toolbox. Filled with expectations, my husband hoisted the thirty-pound box off its shelf and lugged it around back to examine the contents in the sunshine.

He sat down with it on the patio next to the pool. The old gray cat, scared but curious, sniffed at the box. The folks were sitting inside the Florida room, drinking Bloody Marys because it was Sunday morning, and working on their crossword puzzles. I was swimming laps in the pool, looking up whenever I reached the shallow end.

My husband was reaching into the box, pulling out object after object, polishing each one with his rag, squinting at it in the sunlight, and placing it on one of three piles. After half an hour or so he called out to me, "Darlin', you want to come over here? I've got to show you something."



*How many New Yorkers does it take to screw in a lightbulb? The answer is two, one to make the martinis and one to call the janitor.*

I leaped out of the pool and padded over to him, feet going "splish-splish" on the path. He and the cat both shook off my dripping water with the same little quivering gesture.

He pointed to the largest pile in front of him and asked me, "Have you ever seen anything like that?"

It was a complete inventory of everything that had ever gone wrong with the

house. Mom had returned all the spare parts, broken or whole, in the toolbox. There were old knobs and hooks and shutter latches, broken pot handles, drain plugs, filter screen and door jambs, toilet flaps, flush valves, sash cord, lengths of chain, doorbell parts, a lock with no key, shower curtain rings, and hundreds, possibly thousands, of loose nails, screws, washers, and bolts.

In a smaller pile there was an assortment of useless tools: a skate key, a strap wrench, used-up sandpaper, a hacksaw minus the blades, a T-square, a pruning saw, and a selection of paint scrapers.

In the smallest pile he had put the old tried-and-true: a hammer, a pair of pliers, a screwdriver—all he needed for the job.

"Do you think that your parents know the difference between tools and spare parts?" he asked.

I shook my head. Truth is I hadn't realized the difference myself.

"Do you think I ought to tell them?" he asked.

I glanced into the Florida room where they were happily arguing over the clues in their puzzles. I shook my head again. "You know, sweetheart," I told him, "they have their own methods."

That afternoon my husband installed their phone for them and returned the toolbox to the garage. He placed the hammer, pliers, and screwdriver carefully on top of the heap. Later that evening he watched my mother collect the old jack, wall mounting, and screws and toss them in the toolbox.

Just yesterday my husband and I were replacing a leaky pipe under a bathroom sink here in El Sobrante when my son and his friends came trooping into the house and found us.

"Gee, Matt," I heard one of the kids whisper. "Don't your parents know that they can get a plumber to do that?"

"I don't know what's wrong with them," I heard my son reply. "When I'm grown up I'm gonna have a lot of money and let somebody else do all the work." ♦





# Salamat So Long

Cantara Christopher

NINE YEARS AGO and there he was pointing to the telly and calling out, look, there she is, I told you she'd turn up. Out of an ocean of faces, thousands, hundreds of thousands, he sees her. And there he was packing his bag with a wave and a whistle and telling me, I'm off to get your mum, shan't be long, don't wait up.

So I put the whisky back in the cupboard and waited and why not? In an ocean of brown eyes, brown hodies he saw her. I have my father's Irish helly and my mother's Ilocano eyes but you'd never spot me in a crowd, this city's too thick and I'm too much a part of it. This my bosses know, every bastard one of them, and sodding else. Clever girl, climbed out of the muck, the muddy mick muck, three strikes against her as these yanks would say, but she's got a head for figures, as does half my race.



*And then she was gone. In a flash. Went to her ladies one day and never came home. Oh the mortifying worst of it, having to walk up to the doors of those faceless ladies hat in hand, have you seen my wife, is she there, surely you remember her, she works for you, don't you even know her name?*

The other half, well, there was Dad with his Guinness and Granny pinin' for the fiords—no not the fiords, the hills so fresh and green Kathleen—and the low sound of Monty Python on a Tuesday night as Daddy tried to write, and me drumming pots and marching to Monty Python, turn off that bloody noise, and later on it was the low sound of Monty Python on a Tuesday night as Daddy shuffled the cards with some guy from California, turn off that bloody noise, those snobs from Oxford make me sick.

It was cards brought us all together don't you know, a tidy unfixed game of poker in Manila with an untidy and very fixable guy who had a sister, or was it a cousin? She flashed those Ilocano eyes and all was lost, or plenty more than a single night. But what was left for a foreigner in his own land to do but make his way as a foreign correspondent? And him without education or name or credentials. All he ever got out of that adventure was a pregnant Catholic wife, thanks be to the Holy Mother my prayers are answered as Granny Kathleen would say, and frequently. A Catholic wife and a taste for poker.

WAS THERE STILL hope back in blighty? I never knew. All I knew was the passing of time and the cold wind and the unceasing damp and Granny wrapping me up warm, warm in the deep blue cloak of Our Blessed Virgin Mother,

praise her holy name. And never once did I dream of a sultry heach or the soft sexual swaying of palm trees. No, if hope had fled I saw it in my father's eyes though I didn't know it then, watching him watching her as she rose before light from his childhood bed to visit her ladies, tender ladies of Kensington and Holland Park, her hair hound up, her figure trim in jeans, eight stone and built for scrubbing. There it fled after the rising after the slamming of the door, after the rising of his manufactured hrogue as he poured the whisky neat and cursed the damnahle cliché of it all.

But Granny's laundry hands had lived through it all hefore and everything short of murder was a blessing to her. And so through her I kept the honor of our crowded house, and passed my levels, and kept the wrinkles from my uniform, and stood beside the parish priest still as a soldier whilst he administered extreme unction, waiting for the wafer to pass her lips for her to ask me weakly yet again to sing, "Tara, sing, but silly how silly it was, a little brown girl singing this song to a dying old woman

*...across the ocean wild and wide  
to where your heart has ever been  
since first you were my bonny bride...*

But inherited I did my granny's laundry hands, now even the breath of the dead is a blessing.

DADDY WAS lighter after those damp dark days, maybe a little more room for him to breathe gave him hope, he even whisked out his book to jot down a thought or two, for what is more enlightening to the Irish intellect than graceful death? Even the matter of Mother, still graceful in life, became conquerable, and like a hero compassionate in victory he graced her with his early charm. How her tired face lit up, how she graced us in turn with poetry that was fading fast from her memory, lines incomplete and in another conqueror's tongue—*id a mi patria id, extranjerias flores...* And I saw hope in her flashing Ilocano eyes for the first time, hope for him, and a smile that was Kathleen's.

And then she was gone. In a flash. Went to her ladies one day and never came home. Oh the mortifying worst of it, having to walk up to the doors of those faceless ladies hat in hand, have you seen my wife, is she there, surely you remember her, she works for you, don't you even know her name? Because no one did. And oh the reports and oh the dreary police, the cocking eyebrows and my father crumbling, can't you bring in Scotland Yard? Scotland Yard, the sigh, oh sir...

What I was brought up to believe in, in the country of my birth, was in the forgettability of her kind, in the disposability of her kind. But that disposable? That forgettable? If she wasn't there, how in the name of God did the washing get done? Where was she, if not there?

And if where was she, who was she? And what right did someone of her kind have to confound us all at last?

I stopped asking questions flat when the California guy, my father's poker pal, finally, mercifully, whisked Dad and me across the ocean wild and wide. This stoppage of questions, I must advise, was immensely attractive to my bosses, in consequence the

little homestead soon surpassed the damp dwelling of our early years. Flowers in the yard, tomatoes in the garden, oh the abundance of this country!

And you could smell the warm and beckoning Pacific from Daddy's window, the window where he watched and waited



*I broke through the net of my marriage and bounced from here to there and back again, lying on the wild and wide California shore, watching and waiting for the sign that came at last not as a shaft but a whisper, the initials at the end of a story in a foreign newspaper: CFC.*

till I got him the telly, then in front of that he watched and waited till the sign came at last like a shaft of holy light through the heart, *Perla del Mar de Oriente, nuestro per*

*didó Eden*—no, our Eden found.

There she is, he said to me, there's your mother. In a sea of revolution he found her.

NINE YEARS AGO and he was going to finish his unfinished story at last and who was I not to believe too? But still I must advise that such belief carries penalties beyond ordinary endurance, and I had trained for years to become ordinary.

Even California Guy turned away, I broke through the net of my marriage and bounced from here to there and back again, lying on the wild and wide California shore, watching and waiting for the sign that came at last not as a shaft but a whisper, the initials at the end of a story in a foreign newspaper: CFC.

CFC. C. F. C. Colin. Francis. Christopher.

And I knew then that I was right to believe all along praise be to Our Holy Blessed Mother and I and my kind were right to sail in silver ships across uncharted seas and hope or kill hope if it pleased us or let it live again, and I and my kind are sailing even now in silver ships again above the tender murdering ladies of Kensington and Holland Park above the shores of California wild and wide I'll take you home again Kathleen—

*Salamat, salamat. So long.* ♦

## Honorable Mention Poetry



### Still Life

Sometimes I look back over my shoulder at the days when I was my only roommate and I had no diapers to fold, no wild things to read aloud again and again, no Tinkertoys to joint, Baths to administer or nails to prune except my own.

I could turn and turn through a novel all weekend if I chose till I became a character called The Reader, or take a mute stroll in the Arboretum and watch only the waterlilies, blue as searchlights. I could fall in love With anyone who liked to dance with me, no thought, no thought of whether our lives would really blend.

But the truth is I was betting low then, hoping the future would reach back and serve me all my choices at once. I was a still life copied in a museum by a first-year student tinkering with perspective.

Zack Rogow



# Toots and Harry

Mike Underhill

“PARKER 1942.” Cutting the soft, creamy cement with fingerpaint strokes, the Parkers etched their permanent mark into the new Noe Valley sidewalk.

Harry looked up at Toots and smiled the kind of shrugging, helpless grin that grownups wear when they’ve lost a battle of wills with fresh concrete. Across 25th Street, James Lick School stood sentinel watch on the Parkers, newcomers to the neighborhood and the old place on the corner.

Toots and Harry turned from their handiwork and surveyed the house and barn behind them. Six thousand bucks, that’s what the place cost, wrought-iron fence and all. Even for all that money, it still needed work. But now it was theirs, just like before them it had been the Strahles’ and before that the Axfords’. And anyone who wanted to know who the place belonged to only had to look at the sidewalk. In 1942, Harry took care of that.

You can still see the press of Harry’s fingers in the hardened walkway, fifty-three years later silently signaling, “I live here.” When we moved into the old house some ten years after Toots and Harry passed on, we could of course read the soundless message. We just didn’t understand it.

VALENTINE’S DAY 1987 was a busy day. What to Harry and those before him had been the “barn” had become the more genteel-sounding “carriage house.” Whatever its name, it had been our home for the three years preceding the move next door into the graceful, paint-faded Victorian that had guarded the corner for a century or more.

With friends and family helping to carry the furniture, the plates, the books and boxes, and all the other accumulations that two people manage to gather and never throw away, we hung pictures and arranged chairs and couches befitting the shape of the high-ceilinged rooms.

At the end of the day, we sat down to our first meal and toasted the house that welcomed us. Much like Harry forty-five years earlier, we wanted to add our name to those who during the last hundred years had said, “We live here.”

We’d known of Toots and Harry even before we moved into their old house. Fact was, we probably thought and talked more about Toots because her name was so downright brazen and foreign to our post-sixties gender sensibilities. “Toots.” Here was a woman who, if she was anything like her name, could bend an elbow in a 24th Street bar, deck any guy who got out of hand, and still give Rosie the Riveter a run for her money at the Hunters Point shipyards. If personalities could be judged solely on the strength of a name, there was no doubt that Toots bested Harry in an even race.

Over time, the house became ours in feeling and spirit, as well as title. With each small fiefdom of space covered by carpet, wallpaper, or personal belongings, the interior changed like a finished canvas covered over with new colors and shapes by a painter having second thoughts about his original, equally fine work.

To us it was restoration, and historically responsible restoration at that. But perhaps in the eyes of someone, or something, our work had upset an unsensed

harmony between the house and its silent, unseen habitué.

THE FIRST TIME it happened was in the spring of 1987. I walked along the downstairs hallway, past the doors leading to the front and middle parlors, mind tethered to the smell of morning coffee. Stepping through the entrance into the dining room, I sensed the face and eyes to my right, both close enough to touch but for the fact that my body had jumped four feet to the left. My feet hit the ground, body crouched and facing in the direction of the wispy figure standing in the corner.

He, for it was a he, stood shorter than my five-eleven, but with the kind of slightly bent and shrunken frame that belonged to a man taller in his early years. His sparse gray-white hair was combed back above a stubbled, lined face that was about two days on the long side of a shave. His chest and arms were covered with a grayish, almost threadbare plaid wool shirt, which had the sharp smell of mothballs. The eyes

land, turn, and steal a millisecond look at the disappearing image of the nameless man peering, without emotion, into my own eyes.

My ghost friend — and I came to think of him that way—brought with him no epiphany, no sudden realization of the meaning of life, or love, or for that matter death, or whatever state of existence the gray man had passed into. I wanted him to stay, to talk about who he was, where he came from, why he was here, maybe even where I was headed. He kept his wordless counsel, however, leaving me with no answers, but much curiosity.

IN THE BEGINNING, despite the wonderfully outrageous name of his wife, Harry Parker was far down the list. In probing the history of our home for clues to the identity of our strange guest, my wife and I had other candidates.

Will Axford, the Scottish émigré who’d come to the northern states to forge cannon shot in the Civil War, then arrived in San Francisco to settle and eventually build the house, seemed a far more engaging choice. Even the Strahle family, who’d bought the house after it weathered the great 1906 Earthquake and Fire, supplied meatier grist for our retrospections. But Harry had an advantage that the others didn’t: some of our neighbors knew him and could describe him.

Getting a physical depiction of Harry and matching it to my mental image was akin to verbally distinguishing two water-



that peered at me were dispassionate, neither hostile nor friendly. They were the same washed gray color of everything associated with my unbidden morning visitor.

Everything I saw and sensed about the gray-skinned, gray-clad figure was gathered in the quickness of a second, the image immediately disappearing. At the same time, the mind-sketched portrait of the old man burned into my memory like the outline left in the eye after looking into the bright flash of a camera.

When my heart settled, I felt surprise rather than fear, the surprise no different than if a prankster had jumped from behind a door and yelled “Boo!” I have to admit this lack of fear didn’t stem from cold-steel bravery on my part, but more from the simple but clear perception that our visitor harbored no ill will.

THREE MORE TIMES over the next six months our gray figure stood in his corner and met me coming through the same dining-room door. Each time, I reacted in the same fashion: shock, jump,

melons: they all pretty much look big, green, oval from the side, round head-on, and have yellowish stripes running their length. Put two melons together, and the description won’t help a great deal in differentiating one from the other. It was like that with Harry. My neighbors would tell me that in later life the real Harry had grayish-white hair, carried the posture of a man gradually losing his battle with time, and generally had the appearance of the person I’d described. Trouble was, so did a few million other men.

The clue that drew my attention to Harry, though, was the room where he had appeared those few times in 1987. Neighbors who knew Toots and Harry related that the steep stairs to the second-story bedrooms eventually proved too much. Far from conceding defeat in their own house, the Parkers moved their bed and belongings into the dining room and middle parlor, retreating to the downstairs rooms from which they could navigate the short distance to the kitchen and small water closet. Most of their last years were spent in

the dining room turned bedroom, the same room in which my ghost friend had chosen to show himself.

Toots was the first to pass away, then Harry followed not too long after. Perhaps it was his time to leave, or maybe he simply was overcome with loneliness after losing his companion, the woman with the brassy name.

My gut told me that my silent friend was Harry. The resemblance was close enough, though far from conclusive. As for the dining-room connection, it made sense if one assumed that emotional attachments to places and things meant as much to the gray figure as they did to me and my incarnate brethren.

Over the years, I didn’t particularly worry whether I’d ever be able to give my ghost friend a name. I sometimes wished that he would return, but assumed and hoped that he had accomplished whatever it was he had set out to do. Maybe he had satisfied himself that his house was safe with us; maybe he had merely come back for a last, extra look. It was a minor mystery, but one which apparently wasn’t mine to solve. Or so I thought.

ONE WEEKEND DAY last year, I looked out the kitchen window to find a young man walking into the carriage-house garden. He stared at the house, oblivious to my questioning gaze. I finally went outside and asked if I could help. To my surprise, he said that as a child he used to play in the house, which belonged to Aunt Toots and Uncle Harry. I welcomed him inside, where we toured each room and swapped stories about his memories and my attempts to piece together the story of his aunt and uncle. I wavered on revealing my suspicions that I too had met his uncle, weighing how he would take the information against my need to unravel the enigma of the gray man. I elected to tell him since it was possible he had the key to the puzzle: a picture of Harry.

He deflated my hopes by stating that he had no such photograph. However, he related that since he had another aunt who had known Toots and Harry well, he would volunteer to pass along my story. After we said our goodbyes, I put the matter in the back of my mind, assuming that I would never hear from a stranger who, even if she took the time to respond, likely couldn’t offer the proof I wanted. I was wrong on both counts.

A month after my meeting with the Parkers’ nephew, we received a large manila envelope. We didn’t recognize the name or address of the sender, written in an unfamiliar longhand scrawl. As I tore open the seal, old pictures of our house spilled out onto the dining-room table.

Judging by the age of the round-body cars parked on the street, we quickly determined that the photographs were taken in the early 1940s. In one of them, Toots stands at the side of the house in the winter-bare, newly planted garden, looking in the direction of the photographer perched across the street. Behind and to the right of the house, the Sanchez Street hill looms against the skyline.

Sorting through the snapshots, we came to the last one, turned face down on the table. On the back we quickly read, “Harry Parker, Noe Valley, San Francisco, October 1977.” We looked behind us to the corner where my gray ghost friend had appeared in 1987. Nobody there.

We turned back to the table and the small photo, pausing before turning it over. I reached down and flipped it right side up. An older man sat in a chair, legs crossed, looking at the photographer with a neutral expression that gave no hint of emotion or thought. I stared at the face of an old man I had met, if only for a few brief moments years before. I had found my gray friend. His name was Harry. ♦



# Flying with Melanoma

Kathryn Guta

“TAKE THE VALIUM, you’ll feel a lot better.” Dr. Erhart dangled the vial of pills in front of my eyes. I felt a small pop in my chest like my heart was deflating from this well-meant offer.

“Thank you, but I don’t want the Valium. I want to know why I was never told of my malignancy nine years ago when I first came into this office.”

I knew I sounded condemning using language like that, yet I really did want to understand why. I had once been warned by a meditation teacher never to ask “why” questions, largely because they were unanswerable questions. “Why is the sky blue?” “Why was I born?” These questions tend to make the mind spin round and round without getting to the bigger issue of how blue the sky actually is.

I forgot this warning, and all I could think of was “why, why, why,” and *who* was to blame. Someone had to be at fault. The force of habit led me to blame myself.

Yes, I was regressing spiritually. My body cried from every pore, from every soft surface and hard angle: “Please take care of me. Enough of your spirituality.”

I was secretly happy of that. I hated anything that made people superior, and spirituality was sometimes worn as a badge of achievement, separating rather than connecting people. I hated it, but couldn’t deny that I had done it too.

I had spent many nights up till dawn in meditation. I had awakened early with sleep still in my eyes. I had endured cold and heat and scorpions and insects. All to toughen me for this moment of a diagnosis, a cancer diagnosis.

Being a nurse and knowing my family’s cancer track record, I could hardly be surprised when the three tiny dark flecks that appeared on my arm—the three wise men, I called them—stayed to impart a wisdom, a teaching. But all great teachings are received with dread. I knew this. I knew this. I had always wanted to bargain the great teachings out of my life, and this was no different.

MY ARM pains me now as I write this. My fingers are stiff and difficult to use. How will I work when I need my hands to work? How will I support myself? What will I do? I loved to swim, to dance, and walk around the Marin Headlands all day. What will I do?

I can’t deny that somehow in the beginning, behind the horror of this catastrophe, I wanted to die. How strange. My mind was excited by this new terrain. Yet my body was kicking and screaming, resisting every second.

Bodies don’t want to die. You only have to observe an ant in trouble to realize that. But the mind can look at death as a kind of vacation. Club Death.

Now my body was singing a different tune. It wanted to be hugged and caressed and told everything would be all right. All right? Can things be all right when you’re dead? The body ceases to exist when it is abandoned by the mind. Perhaps it is the ultimate abandonment. The mind can careen through galaxies, yet the body turns to dust in a matter of weeks or months. In the Thai jungle, corpses explode into a gooey mass in just a few days.

“I was going to get my hair cut, but why bother.” My mind amused me. The

thoughts were ricocheting in the canyons. One moment I felt guilty that I hadn’t taken better care of my body. Then I remembered that I’d taken better care of myself than anyone else I knew!

I was grabbing moments as they came to me. Walking down 27th Street I noticed how blue the sky was. I didn’t ask why. I grabbed that moment and realized that there was absolutely no problem right then. It was only in my mind that the chatter continued.

“TAKE THE VALIUM,” the doctor said. “Melanoma,” the pathology report read.

I read the report thoroughly, studying it like a lawyer with a brief, reviewing it to find some flaw, something that did not fit. There it was: “Recurrent melanoma.” If it was recurrent, why was I not told nine years ago, when I first showed the doctor the change in the mole?

I requested and got the slides of my skin. I carried them home in a plastic case in a manila envelope under my arm. Exhibit A. I wanted to see the slides for myself. Not that I doubted the diagnosis. It was just that the story did not fit.

I was going about things in my usual logical manner, gathering all my intelli-

gence to apply it to the problem. Later I could afford to fall apart. Now I wanted to understand what had happened. I wanted to see the slides for myself.

My mind traveled to India to the cremation ghats at Varanasi. Rather, my senses remembered the acrid smell of human flesh burning. There’s nothing like it. One night I took a riverboat out on the Ganges. Colored lights outlined the boat. It looked happy like a party boat, only it took you down the river...to death. Devout, dying Hindus flock to Varanasi for the comfort of having their ashes thrown into the Mother Ganga.

As I passed each funeral pyre, I pressed my hands into the railing and tried to continue to breathe as the smoke filled my lungs. Someday this would be my fate. “Know this now,” I thought.

People will love me if I die bravely, still young and beautiful. Look at her, a cancer victim. I would die as I had watched Debra Winger die in at least two movies. I have to die sometime anyway, so I might as well get it over with.

I am fearful of my negative thinking. It is like I already have one foot in the grave. I should be thinking positively now. Everyone is telling me this.

I am tired and go to sleep. I notice my father on my left shoulder and my brother on my right—two spirits who have gone before me returning at a critical moment, two wings sprouting on my shoulders carrying me to whatever the next step is. “What is my fate?” I ask and get no reply.

IT ALWAYS seemed to me fundamentally unfair that no matter how much spiritual practice I did, I still felt like hell a lot of the time. I guess I thought that practicing and understanding something about

the true nature of things would cushion me against life. This is not true. What is true is that I feel things more. I feel better *and* worse than I did before I undertook this path. I also feel ripped off. I wish there were warning labels on these meditation practices: “Caution, you may feel worse before you feel better.” The point is to feel, to

*Bodies don’t want to die. You only have to observe an ant in trouble to realize that. But the mind can look at death as a kind of vacation. Club Death.*

live in the pores of the flesh and the marrow of the bone. Yet I hate it when it’s bad.

I had one week of hell. Walls pressed in on me. Then I woke up on Friday morning and I was peaceful. I understood the fruits of practice. I cried in gratitude. I understood that cancer might be with this body to the grave, but that I could make friends with it. Cancer could have its place in my body.

I always saw a clear distinction between cancer and not cancer, between those with cancer and those without. Now I only see gray areas. I am the same person I was before cancer. In fact, I may have had cancer a long time without knowing it. I am not different, yet I am fundamentally changed by this news. I feel no escape yet I’m not unhappy either. I want to work it out with this demon cancer.

TWO DOCTORS SAID I had a poor prognosis. They seemed certain. The third said he didn’t know. How I grabbed onto those words. I wanted to unfurl a banner and march through the streets. “He doesn’t know. He doesn’t know.”

People have asked me, “How do you know that the first two weren’t right?” The truth is I don’t know. But I do know that they don’t know either. Who among us can play God and know the moment of death?

The other side of not knowing is that any of us can die unexpectedly, perfectly healthy. Two years ago, I bundled my brother, his wife, and three kids onto a plane, and they never got to their destination. “Plane crash, Kathmandu, terribly sorry, all are dead,” said the man from the State Department in an early morning phone call. “Don’t know” is a gem holding within it the truth that life is uncertain.

I don’t worry about retirement now. I had feared I might become a bag lady and die on the streets. Now I feel the support of my family and friends, and I know I am alive only due to their generosity.

I have become a receiver. This is a different role. It is not always easy. I have become a giant receiver, bigger than the radio tower on top of Twin Peaks. There is no other way to sustain my life. The two wings I felt sprouting on my shoulders at the time of the diagnosis have been nurtured and tended to by many loving hands. I feel I am being carried by kindness. I hope I never again doubt that I am loved.

My friend Michael told me, “Don’t think this melanoma has taken anything from you. It has given you something more. It has made you greater.”

When he said this, I looked into his freckled face severely darkened with KS lesions and saw his eyes were as bright as bluebells. I could not doubt that what he said was true. ♦

## Honorable Mention Poetry

### *I Peregrino*

In today’s news, the two-ton peregrino escapes from the rich man’s Mexico estate and travels north,  
25 miles to an irrigated field.  
Submerged all day, he ravages the crops by night.  
At first the farmers are afraid but later they learn they want to keep him when the politicians make him a symbol of good to come. He takes offense and disappears, but finally they find him—ah, there’s a symbol—in raw sewage.

I dreamed that hippo, I saw him lift that large and crumpled head out of a puddle, as I walked down some sidewalk, a man, a child, and me. Is any place safe from mankind? asks this week’s *Time*  
But this is not a political poem, this is about my dream. I want to know how it would feel to walk the bottom of a river, even raw sewage, to lift my head, to have everyone looking for me.

Nancy Sully





#### Honorable Mention Poetry

### *T*hese Things, That Others May Call Miracles

And here I am, trembling over white wine in a waterfront restaurant  
found by this investigative angel on a mission of deliverance  
I love that she is as nervous as me, doesn't ask me to explain  
the wounding event, the adoption of thirty years ago, I love that

she has her father's hair, only on her it's sun-lit and wheaten  
and she has my deep set eyes though burnished in gentle green  
and looking at me, loving me, she says she has always loved me  
even the humped and heavy memory of my hending shadow  
this young lady, my daughter, has loved even my phantom

we declare each other in a claim that rises and cuts  
through the immediate like the blade of an old, old dagger  
that her hands lift from its self-plunge into my soul  
it is her grasp that draws it forth like Excalibur from rock  
carefully, as a garden rake pulled from a manatee's hack  
mouse gently, as a bristly splinter from a lion's injured paw

she lifts it aloft, exposes it as the sharp edged monstrence it is  
and in one pure glittering motion, one solmen wave  
she slashes the cataract of heaven's eye

and here I am in a swirl of released stars of white fog  
that pour down, tumble down on air white wings of recognitions  
first-born sensations, I remember, recognize, and it is all in this moment  
more glistening than imagined, this moment that holds all other moments  
on the pier in front of a waterside restaurant, it is all in this moment  
that these things, that others may call miracles, fall on me  
fall on me, and make me more.

*Eileen Malone*



# The Tropical Bakery

Douglas A. Konecky

ONCE UPON A TIME, your Mom, the Duck, your brother, the dog, and you and I lived in a corner of East Hollywood where the sky was the color of a manila envelope. The air was green with diesel exhaust fumes from the express buses, and the endless lines of cars with their catalytic converters disabled had stained the sidewalks a permanent industrial beige. And at one busy intersection, near the corner of Beige and Manila, was a small building that was painted bright pink, and neon yellow, and electric blue, and decorated with thirty-foot-tall pineapples and mangoes. This was the Tropical Bakery.

Traffic or no traffic, the air on the street was sweet compared to the back corner inside the Tropical Bakery. Here, the Cuban guys would suck thick, viscous smoke out of cigarettes made in a land where filters are for sissies, hold it in their lungs a few seconds, then exhale into their demitasse cups of half strong black coffee and half sugar. Crumpled red and blue packs of Caporales littered the tables like small volcanoes, and the ashtrays were constantly exploding, lava-like, spewing butts and burnt-up matches onto the floor. This still life was not still. There was constant motion of acrid, blue smoke rising from table to ceiling, and at any hour of any morning there would be half a dozen semi-invisible men at each of the two rear tables, Chulo in a sleeveless white ribbed T-shirt, Sam in a blue industrial uniform with his

You ordered it *con leche*, a regular-sized cup filled one half of the way up the side with coffee and the rest with steamed milk; or *tinto*, in a demitasse cup with the coffee the texture of hot velour. The Cuban guys poured monumental amounts of sugar into their cups, completely inverting the shaker then turning their heads to tell long off-color jokes which had many punch lines and plot convolutions. There was no way the solution of coffee could absorb all that sugar, so they would have to finish the joke, down the brew all in one gulp before the sugar could settle out, then light a cigarette in the air, the signal for Reina or Carmen or Lourdes to bring over yet another cup.

HALFWAY DOWN the narrow shop was a long counter, where nonsmokers or non-Cubans could sit on slat-back stools and order pastries to go with their coffee, maybe a *guayaba con queso*, fresh guava, or guava and cream cheese rolled into flaky filo dough; or *empanaditas*, more flaky crust filled with meat or cheese or guava paste and raisins; or hot croissants, which arrived from the ovens on steaming trays every fifteen minutes or so and were devoured within seconds; or Italian biscottis you could dip in your coffee for ten minutes and they would still never get soft. These were known as "Gusto de la Mujer"—Lady's Delight.

Not too many years back, Rogelio, the Tropical's owner, had looked around and discovered that this marginal neighborhood was no longer home only to Cuban and Central American immigrants, but also to struggling actors and painters and musicians and drug dealers and film editors and students at schools of law and institutes of horoscopy, and Republicans and followers of other obscure religious cults. All these people were writing novels, and they loved to sit around and talk about these novels, and they all needed a place to do it, and that's when Rogelio installed the juicer. Now, side by side at the counter stood Salvadorean businessmen knocking back espressos in smart brown suits with dark slicked back hair, porno film editors drinking carrot juice in paint-stained Reeboks and T-shirts that said SLASH WORLD TOUR, and girls with brass rings through their cheeks and their spiked hair dyed purple devouring empanadas, cheeses only, because they considered eating meat to be weird, all regarding each other with respect, since each had, after all, discovered the Tropical, the coolest spot in town.

ALSO SITTING at the counter, before school started, every Wednesday morning, were you, five years old, and I, somewhat older.

You would sometimes have a lot of trouble making up your mind, which is strange, since you almost always ordered the same thing: a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice, a hot croissant, and a big round Cuban cookie covered with red, green, and yellow sprinkles to put in your lunch bag. Reina, the counter girl who usually waited on us, would ask you what you wanted, first in Spanish, and then in English when you hesitated. Sometimes

you would answer her in Spanish, sometimes in English, but most of the time you'd climb down off your stool and lead her by the hand over to the bakery display case, and point to the big round cookie with all the sprinkles. Sometimes you would say That One. Sometimes you would say Esa.

Reina, Carmen, and Lourdes were all exactly the same height. Reina was Guatemalan, with sexy, dark hooded eyes. Carmen was Nicaraguan, with more rounded corners, a gold front tooth, and a cleavage that she heaved from side to side with vivacious pleasure. Lourdes was from Outer Space, older than Reina or Carmen, and not at all ten toes to the floor. Reina would remember I liked cafe con leche but not in a styrofoam cup. Carmen didn't always remember about the styrofoam cup, but she always remembered your name and always strained your orange juice for you. Lourdes... Lourdes would bring us whatever she felt like bringing us. We ordered cafe con leche, we might get cafe con leche, or we might get espresso, or grapefruit juice, or a glass of water. Nobody minded. Lourdes was a refugee, from the savagery in El Salvador, and everybody treated her with kindness. Her eyes reflected a different landscape, one where the people didn't have time to worry about the wrong pastry or coffee in the wrong kind of cup. This is a tough world, and a fast city, and the Tropical was always everyone's refuge.

But one day Lourdes was gone. That same day Rogelio looked around again and discovered that along with the Cubans and artists there was also a sizable gay community here. Not long after Lourdes left, Larry was behind the counter.

THE TROPICAL sold piñatas and specialized in birthday cakes. The quality of the cakes can best be imagined by remembering that the beverage of choice to be served with any of these cakes was cherry Kool-Aid.

The cakes came, however, with your choice of complementary plastic figurines. And one year you took one look at the Smurf family stuck into the frosting on top of the Tropical Banana Surprise, and you bit. No matter how we tried, we could not change your mind.

For your birthday party you wanted Tropical Banana Surprise covered with guava paste and topped with Brainy Smurf, Smurfette, Doc Smurf, and Gargamel.

You only did this one time. We had your party in the park. We cut the cake in pieces and gave each of your friends a large piece on a paper plate. Everybody took one bite then screwed up their eyes and grimaced. They put down their forks. Some started to cry. When the party was over we threw away all the plates with one bite taken out of each piece of cake, and tossed the rest of the uncut cake in the dumpster behind the paper plates. But you just smiled, and stuffed Brainy, Smurfette, Doc, and Gargamel in your pocket. You had known all along.

At one point the great salesman who had sold Rogelio the Smurf figures for the tops of his cakes came through town again, and not long after this a series of obscure printed signs appeared in various spots in the store. One said:

*"Es agradable ser importante, pero es mas importante ser agradable!"*

This sign hung over the cash register where Reina and Carmen would scream gutter Spanish at the street drunks, who would hurl insults right back. The sign translated as: "It is nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice," as the *borrachos*' and the *meseras*' shrill Central American invective filled the air.

Another sign said: *Fumar Prohibido!!!* (No Smoking).

But you couldn't see that one very well because Rogelio had hung it in the back where the smoke was so thick you couldn't even find the wall, let alone read the sign.

Another sign read: "*Bebidas Colicos Is Pormeanned*," which means nothing in any language, and must have been the Sign-To-Be-Named-Later in some forgotten trade.

This incomprehensible sign was sandwiched on a rafter between two electric clocks, one of which was an hour and twelve minutes behind the other. This seemed to symbolize the difference between Cuban time and American time, and was a crucial component of Tropicalian ambience. For here time stopped. Appointments could wait. Here you began your day with a Latin vibe, slow and languorous, a steamy hot cup of coffee, and a patient waitress bringing you

*Then look down at your beautiful daughter in the cream-colored dress with the little red embossed hearts, and feel your heart bump... it is not the caffeine... Daddy? Are you crying again? she says...*

a delicious flaky pastry and a newspaper from the newsstand outside.

Stand at the counter, or sip your coffee, munch your guayaba, listen to Rogelio and his pals thrusting their metaphorical middle fingers in the air at Fidel Castro; hear the two sandalled filmmakers arguing about Marcel Orphul's latest documentary (which neither has seen); watch the young businesslady in the power suit debating with her ex-Pritikin counselor about two guayabas and an empanada to go; lean back and put your feet up and whisper a futile sweet nothing to Reina, who smiles back and actually, for a moment, maybe... nahhhh. Then look down at your beautiful daughter in the cream-colored dress with the little red embossed hearts, and feel your heart bump... it is not the caffeine... Daddy? Are you crying again? she says... and place her big round cookie with the sprinkles in her lunch bag, and call "*Buenos dias, que le vaya bien*" to all, and walk out to the car, fasten both of your seat belts, and cruise the manila morning, down Sunset Boulevard to Tamara's class, where one of you will spend your day playing with the clay and the other will go back home to sit in front of the computer until his brains get mushy like the inside of an empanada.

So I propose a toast to this tiny corner of the real, not the sit-com world, and to Rogelio, who will sooner or later sell this place and make a lot of money. One day when all of this is glass and concrete, and the croissants and coffees are \$3.50 each, and there is no more smoke, and caffeine is illegal, we shall still remember you, Rogelio. We shall raise our carrot juices and drink this toast to you:

*Salud!  
Salud!  
Salud!*

Chulo says hi. ♦

*Crumpled red and blue packs of Caporales littered the tables like small volcanoes, and the ashtrays were constantly exploding, lava-like, spewing butts and burnt-up matches onto the floor.*

name sewn on the pocket with rough red thread, Roberto in a sport shirt and a Panama hat, but no identification could ever be upheld in a court of law, enveloped as the whole scene was in a thick impenetrable potage of turgid cigarette smoke mixed with steam from endless cups of coffee.

Don't get me wrong. This was not just coffee, this was the best cup of coffee in the city, in anyone's city, the best in the English-speaking world, though you could question this if you chose. Not the part about the coffee, the part about it being in the English-speaking world. No lily-lipped American coffee was ever served here. The Tropical served Cuban-style only, too strong for many, but for those who love flavor along with shoulder-popping jolts of caffeine, this was the pinnacle, the Oscar, the ultimate cup, the taste toward which all coffee beans through history had been hred.



# Small Things

Kristin Anundsen

WHEN MY ten-year-old daughter brought home the toad, she brought a piece of my own childhood with it. Up at the lake, I used to study toads. They were *very* different from frogs and on the whole I liked them better. They were smooth, not slimy. Some kids said they gave you warts, but I never had a wart in my life and I handled toads all the time. (You may be thinking I was a tom-boy, but I wasn't. My father—when he was still with us—did teach me to catch and throw a baseball, but I had long hair and liked playing with dollhouses more than playing softball.)

Once I followed a toad around to see what he would do. He hopped up the hill, away from the water, and it turned out he was looking for dinner. Although of course he didn't think of it as dinner—life was just one big mealtime for him.

This toad took little slow hops up to where leaves and twigs and pine needles covered the ground. Then he stopped and turned his nose down slightly. Suddenly his tongue flashed out and disappeared back inside his mouth. He blinked with satisfaction. I thought he'd eaten an ant, but I wasn't sure. So I began putting ants in front of him. A frog would have leaped away, exasperated and jittery, but the toad just stayed there, thinking or just waiting. He completely ignored the black ants and the red ants. But when I put a big ant that had both red and black segments in front of him, I could tell right away he was interested. Down dipped his nose, and blp! the ant was gone.

Nowadays I don't have time for such small things. But when I was my daughter's age, I lived in a world of small things, even though I was tall. The lake house gave me plenty of opportunities to visit this world. I remember wading along the edge of the lake, my bare feet squishing in the white sand, picking tiny wild blueberries from shoreline bushes. The berries were so small that I had to pick a lot of them to get enough for a pie, especially since I ate half of them as I was going along.

But I had time, plenty of time to pick and taste. And I didn't want to go back up to the house. Earlier I had seen our neighbor, Mrs. McPhee, talking with my father by the back door. I didn't like her very much. She had green eyes and long red hair, and she laughed a lot. She was much younger than her husband, a big, silent man. The McPhees, Maureen and Stan, often visited my parents, staying late and having drinks. From my bedroom I could hear Mrs. McPhee laughing, and it kept me awake. That made me mad sometimes.

NOW MY DAUGHTER was distracting me, asking for a box for the toad. We went out to the garage to see what we could find. I reminded her that the toad was a wild animal and she would have to let it go very soon so it could find its food. I didn't tell her the story about the ants.

Later, I tried to put myself back at the lake, the way I sometimes insert myself back into dreams from which I've been awakened. If I'm successful, the dream always takes a new turn. If I'm not successful—that is, if I can't get back to sleep again—I make up the rest of the dream. I make it come out the way I want.

Standing at the sink, absently washing

dishes, I took my mind back to the lake house. What did it look like? The images began to appear, as quickly as on a new Polaroid photo. The lake was about a mile across and shaped like a frying pan. People often picnicked out on the small island near the middle. My father used to take me fishing in our rowboat into the panhandle part of the lake because he thought the biggest bass hid out there. He taught me to bait a hook and clean a fish. Whenever I caught something, he'd get so excited and proud that he made me feel as though I'd just landed Moby Dick.

When I was eight or nine he had a beard for a while. I thought it was strange that his beard was golden red even though the hair on his head was dark brown. I thought he was the handsomest man in Wisconsin.

The lake house has a screened-in porch, with two uncomfortable daybeds where my cousins slept when they came to visit. At one end of the porch was a picnic table covered in blue-patterned oilcloth, and on the oilcloth stood a kerosene lamp. There was no electricity in the lake house—we had to read during the day because the kerosene lamp didn't give enough light at night.

Now the kitchen appeared in my memory: the small wood-framed windows, the smell of the stove as my father slipped freshly chopped wood into it, my mother taking food out of the clunky metal icebox. Then the bedrooms...

A SHARP PAIN brought me back to the present. Surprised, I looked down at my finger, which was leaking blood into the stream of water from the faucet. A piece of broken wineglass lay in my palm. I rinsed my hands and pressed a piece of paper towel on the cut until it stopped bleeding. I was relieved at having to stop my "woolgathering," as my mother would have called it.

There are times when I fantasize about staying in my mind, or in my dreams, and never coming back to the real world. It's a scary thought, but scary in a delicious, mysterious sort of way. I know there are other worlds, probably a lot of them, past and present and future, and the one I'm in now (that is, the one I perceive) is only a single particular perspective. I could live in another world, maybe if I chose to and maybe without my choosing.

This time, I chose the "real." I deliberately didn't think of the lake house again the rest of the day, though something was bumping against the walls I had put up against it, something that wanted to burst into consciousness. You can't *not think* of something for very long, on purpose.

So of course, that evening, I experienced another memory-jog. I was cleaning out a drawer so I could throw out old stuff, like bathing suits and hair ties, and as I touched one old swimsuit the feel of it suddenly reminded me of taking off my suit at the lake. We used to change down by the water, in a shed where we kept oars and lifejackets. Right away I was in that shed again, and just as I got naked, I heard voices outside.

"We could take the boat over to the other side of the lake," said a man's voice, very low, with a tiny edge of urgency. It was my father's voice.

"Oh, Earl, no, I don't think so." This was a woman's voice. Not my mother's. That tense, breathy tone belonged to Mrs. McPhee. That was all I heard, or all I could

distinguish in their conversation. They turned away and their voices and footsteps moved up toward the house.

At this memory, my heart started racing. Was I making this up? No, I wished I were, but it was too vivid. The way Mrs. McPhee had said my father's name, "Earl," made me want to run away, only I wasn't dressed.

This feeling was in the past, but now past and present fused. I felt naked and immobilized standing there by the chest of drawers with a bathing suit in my hand.

Then, although I tried to keep the image away, my mother's face appeared just



*Without looking at me  
she gestured, palm down, for  
me to approach quietly. I did.  
"I'm watching a snake for  
you," she whispered.*

behind my eyes. I knew at once that she knew about my father and Maureen McPhee. Her face was as pale as her ash-blond hair; deep lines radiated from the corners of her wide, damp eyes. The picture shifted: My mother was standing outside the house, very still, her posture erect, but staring at the ground. What was she doing? What was she looking at?

I walked toward her, a pan full of wild blueberries in my hand. Without looking at me she gestured, palm down, for me to approach quietly. I did. "I'm watching a snake for you," she whispered. I followed her gaze to a diminutive striped garter snake curved in the clover. I sneaked up behind it and snatched it, holding it in the middle so it couldn't get away. It was harmless—no need to worry about snakebite. After a while I'd be able to let it crawl around my arm, neither of us afraid.

My mother, however, was afraid of snakes. I knew that. It was only for me that she would step so far out of character as to follow one around until I could get there to catch it. She looked at me, with that snake coiled around my arm, with a mixture of distaste, curiosity, and hunger. Hunger for gratitude, for love. A part of her, I now realized, wanted to enter my world, which was so full of interesting small things and so free of terrible big things.

But I never let her in. That world was mine and I had to protect it. I didn't let my father in either, not that he wanted in; he seemed content to share a few activities with me, and didn't notice that my mind was often far away.

Closing them both out, I talked to my dollhouse dolls and sometimes had them act out little fairytale plays when no one was around. Or I became involved in the lives—real and imaginary—of the toads, frogs, snakes, and other small creatures that populated my universe. My focus grew sharper and narrower. Sometimes I told my friends about my nature secrets and fantasies, but not my parents.

The summer that flashed into memory was our last summer at the lake. After my father went away, my mother decided to sell the house. We never went back. My mother refused to let me speak to my father anymore or even to talk about him. But somehow I found out, much later, that he'd gotten married again (not to Maureen McPhee).

Now, every so often, I find myself wondering about the lake house. Do the wild blueberries still grow down by the water? Do the people who stay at the house read by electric light these days? Would that one particular flagstone step still curve to fit the instep of my bare foot exactly, or would the curve be too small? ♦

## Honorable Mention Poetry

### Music Critic

"What is that awful sound?!" she said,  
"What kind of music is that? What is that noise?"  
I dunno, I said, is it your voice?

Or is it some speed freaks rubbing balloons?  
A broken calliope?  
Archie Shepp running off the tape heads?  
The center of one mixed up world?  
A kind of pinkish whine?  
A complaint? An expression of failure?  
Fierce cooperation?  
Music for heroes of a mental revolution?  
Is it a funky popcorn machine?  
An aircraft carrier talking to itself?

That's a hard one. I'm not sure what it is.  
A sermon? A cry for help?  
A South American vine singing to us?  
A ghost of an ecstatic moment?  
Does the sound speak  
Of a propensity for violence that I like?  
Is it a rapidly rotating and collapsing black hole?  
Is it a hot and sticky proposition?  
A challenge? A treasure map?  
An answer to a math problem?  
Is it simply hormones in motion?  
What is that awful noise?  
Is it your voice?

Whitman McGowan



# Thunderstorms

Carolyn Brown

WAITING WAS Nebraska, watching the dark purple wall of sky move toward me and wondering when the first clap of thunder would explode. I'd be sitting with my feet in the stream next to my best friend Jamie making boats out of sticks, pieces of trash, and thrown-away beer cans. Then one of us would feel the air thickening with water and the afternoon darkening around the western edge, look up and see the storm coming. We'd go back to our boat-building, but we'd be wondering: when should we start running for home?

Now I'm sitting on the back porch in Nevada City with my feet dangling over the edge and my forehead pressed against the lower rail. My finger traces the rutted surface of the whitewashed wood. Pick at

fine until you outgrew your hiding place.

A tickle of grass along the bottom of my foot, persistent, and I kick hard, hit something. I'm up on my elbows fast and almost afraid, even as I hear Jamie laughing. He stumbles back, zigzag legs, both hands flar on his chest around an imaginary arrow. Crumples to the ground in a heap of red wool shirt, the shoulder seam ripped in back.

HE'S NEVER STOPPED being that boy by the stream, picking up rocks and watching the bugs scurry across the dirt, throwing the roundish rocks as hard as he can downstream while I count the 1-1,000's till the plunk. He runs a little hardware store in the center of town. Rows of little orderly bins with nails and screws and bolts. Silver and copper gleaming. Spools of wire. Stacked cans of paint. A dozen kinds of doorknobs. It's not the kind of job they make movies about, not a thing a woman says breathlessly to her girlfriends: my husband runs a little hardware store on Second Street.

He holds out a spool of fishing line for my inspection. "There's time for a little fishing," he says, and I know he's been waiting all afternoon, in and out of the procession of talkative customers, to stand by the river while the light changes and the night air comes up cool off the water.

I struggle to a sitting position. Elbow looped over the porch rail, hand swinging.

"We can take the truck down," he says, looking at the giant mound of blue dress in my lap. "Just in case." I forget

sometimes that he's waiting too. I'm so consumed by the waiting I can hardly breathe. Sitting with a wrapped package in my lap, staring at the perfect blue bow.

He's looking at the chipped white paint below my elbow where I was picking earlier. He reaches for it and smooths it, wanting sandpaper and a paintbrush.

Down by the river, I sit in an old canvas chair and watch the white water surge over the rocks and logs. The spring run-off is fast after the wet winter, and next to it Jamie is tall and immobile, a tree. Everywhere green is spurting out toward nothing in particular. The thimbleberry and mug-

wants to talk to Jamie. Stretched out on the couch with the phone propped on the pillow, he is barely interested in what she is saying. I don't need to be on the line to know she wants him to look into a big-store franchise, city girl.

But the big stores are coming fast. On the edges of town, off the Highway 49 exit ramps, there are new stucco strip malls and parking lots where grass had been growing for a long, long time. It's funny that Jamie and I are the ones fighting change so hard. The new kids in town still, after almost five years. We fool ourselves into believing that this place is beyond the reach of the bulldozers, too far for the Sacramento commuters and too close for the vacationers. A green place, young and naive.

The town is in love with Jamie. Generous ear, easy smile. He built a pair of benches for the front porch of the hardware store and there's always someone sitting there, coffee and a doughnut from the bakery next door. He keeps a guitar by the door, plays whenever business is slow. Someone told me Ted Hale who owns the favorite bar has been asking Jamie to play for tips, but I doubt he ever will.

I know without anybody saying anything that Jamie makes up for me somehow. Not that I'm the wicked witch, but I don't have his natural charm. I'll get up on the oak bar and sing "Summertime" to a full house at Ted's, but I don't know what to say when people reach down and pat my giant belly, look at me expectantly. "Aren't you excited?" they ask.

Maybe a lot of pregnant women have nightmares about dropping their babies, but it's different when your soul has fallen so many times and knows it will fall again. Only this time it will be holding another life and falling, crying deeper than the baby.

There's no one who can catch me now, no one I could tell. True, Jamie knows my sad times, and has held me through the darkness. But I can't tell him I'm afraid that there's a girl inside my belly. A girl who will be just like me. ♦

*"We can take the truck down," he says, looking at the giant mound of blue dress in my lap. "Just in case."*

the paint edges, knowing I shouldn't. But it keeps my hand from falling to its natural place on my belly.

I'm probably two weeks away from the thunderclaps and there is nowhere to run.

Jamie, once my best friend and now my husband, thinks it's the birthing pain I'm afraid of and he told me again about walking all the way home from Camp-tonville—twenty miles—when he broke his leg. My sister Martha thinks I'm afraid of the baby—that it will cry all day and all night until its throat closes up right.

No, it's me I'm afraid of. Me and the times of falling. Like those people who jump out of airplanes, only I'm kicked out like a dog off the bed and I'm falling through darkness into dark. There's no parachute anywhere, I know. I'm just falling and I will never reach the ground.

Not every day is like this. Whole months can go by and I'm the queen of River Street. I'm the girl at the bar with the waterfall smile and the feet that can dance across logs. I love my man and I love myself and I love every little thing in between.

It was a night after probably fifty days like this when I told Jamie okay and we did it like we always wanted to... for the blind creation of a life. The connecting of energies that ran off together deep inside my belly to hide.

In the first few weeks, I thought of the little Jamie and the little Beck huddled together like under the porch of his grandmother's house back in Nebraska. A hot afternoon and a sudden storm and us crouched in the musty cobwebs listening to the rain.

The baby could hardly be hiding now, and I lie back onto the redwood planks, pull up my dress to prove it. A mountain of pale flesh stretched taut, treeless and barren. Been clear-cut and shaved. And inside, a little brown animal curled up in his burrow, thinking he is well hidden and safe. I laugh out loud at the silly failure at hide-and-seek. What place could be more obvious than a woman's flat belly? Everything was

wort are taking over the rocky riverbank, and the spirea's pink blossoms poke out from the green. They may recognize Jamie and me, old friends to this fishing spot at twilight. But it could be I'm imagining the reassurance I feel, breathing from the fear-less blossoming.

BY THE TIME we get back to the house, empty-handed, I'm too hungry to cook. Just spread butter on thick toast. The phone rings and it's Martha, making sure nothing has happened yet. She has sent a half-dozen books and a receiving blanket, a catalog of baby supplies with a gift certificate. She's just been to a giant new hardware store in San Francisco and





# A Match Made in Graceland

Carol Ormandy

WE SHOULDN'T BE married. Really, there is no way that Phil and I should be celebrating fourteen years of marriage in a few days. As different as we are, it's amazing that we even went out on one date.

Some surprises come wrapped in brown paper or cellophane. Phil was packaged in polyester, and I do mean polyester. Sure it was the late seventies, but I'd never been attracted to a man who wore anything but Levis, khakis, or at least real material. He also wore pointed cowboy boots, long before they were in style, and I thought I'd be embarrassed by the cowboy boots, until we got ready to go out one night and I saw his dress shoes. He looked like everything I'd made fun of for most of my life. People who knew us didn't think we'd make it to the second date.

Falling in love with Phil forced me to confront prejudices I was either proud of or didn't know I had. He is from Tennessee,

man. I was in the stage of swearing off marriage altogether when I met Phil, my knight in shining polyester. Phil was thirty-six, frustrated and bored in his first marriage. But we definitely didn't match.

While he ran the shop, I got stoned. He was neat. I wore my hair in a grown-out brush cut. I got out of working as often as I could, and even whistled at the men on the line. Half of me was still very San Francisco, and the other part was working in a factory nicknamed "Little Kentucky," being one of the last plants to hire women, or any other minorities. I was missing wild nights dancing at the Stud on Folsom Street, and I was working in a plant that almost had to shut down the day Elvis died.

On that fateful day, I came to work and heard some people saying, "The King is dead." I tried to get my bearings and think of which countries had kings and why should all these people care. I felt like I was in another world, a time warp or something. People were calling in sick, or having to leave the line to cry or faint. What was the big deal? I'd already been through this with Jimi, Janis, and Jim.

BY THE TIME Phil asked me out, I was a union gal, Rosie the Riveter, and really into my newest incarnation — a proud proletarian. Still, no one expected me to date a foreman. I had just separated from my second husband after a five-month marriage made in hell. My family hadn't liked him much. I'm not sure if it was his bisexuality, drug addiction, or his having been in jail, but this was one time they were glad I'd screwed up another relationship. However, they were not prepared for Phil. When I was a kid, my parents never allowed us to use racial slurs, but calling someone a hillbilly was fine, and Phil was obviously a "Billy," as my mom used to call people from the South.

I decided to go out with him because I knew that he genuinely liked and respected women, which is a rarity anywhere, but especially in the factory where we worked. He never made passes or lewd comments. He made eye, not breast contact, and never patronized women. He was the only man in the place that didn't seem bothered that women had entered this rough and greasy male domain.

When Phil showed up to take me out on our first date, I'm not sure what I regretted more, smoking a joint of killer weed before he arrived or promising my family that I'd bring him over to meet them before we went out. Phil was dressed in an outfit that made me want to laugh because I was high and cry because I was bringing him over to meet my family. He had on white patent-leather shoes with gold, buckle-like things on them. He was wearing white polyester flared pants that were a bit short and a black polyester shirt with white polka dots.

My family has five daughters and we've been known to crucify people without their ever feeling the nails going in. We were merciless. It's a catty telepathy: our putdowns were often a silent look across the table that only we understood. Our victims, otherwise known as dates, were unaware of being inspected and graded. And now, I was about to bring over another unsuspecting nice guy and he was dressed like this.

But everyone behaved. I think that Phil's outfit was beyond anything that even my family was prepared to deal with. It

would have been almost redundant for them to make fun of him.

Phil, in his typical, gentlemanly way, invited them to join us in the surprise he had planned for me. Everyone except my younger sister Annie declined. She was underage, but Phil let us know that he was connected at the club we were going to and he could get her in.

Phil was correct that this date would really impress me. It turned out that one of Phil's closest friends was an Elvis impersonator. His creativity was immediately apparent—he spelled his name without the e. Lvis also wore a cape and huge belt. Unfortunately, we were late, and even though Phil was connected at the Blue Bonnet bar, we had to stand in the back. This was a shame because I could not see over some of the hairdos, which were made even taller by the spiked heels the women were wearing.

My sister and I had made the mistake of smoking another joint on the way, and the laughter and shock I'd been suppressing all evening began to leak out. You know how it is when you're standing next to someone and both of you are laughing inside so hard that your shoulders shake? Well, this is what happened to my sister and me. And the more we tried to hold it in, the more our shoulders vibrated against each other. While Lvis was singing "Hunk of Burning Love," he began to toss out hankies that his mother had embroidered. We ran to the ladies room to avoid wetting our pants.

THE FACT THAT we had a second date and that Phil moved in with me on the third is still a mystery. I was living in a flat that was decorated with some of my favorite items: a brass hula girl lamp, three stolen plastic pink flamingos, a few beers and some cheese in the refrigerator, and an electric train set. Phil's house was like one of those I'd liberated a pink flamingo from when I moved back to Michigan. It still

other ideas on decorating, but hadn't done much about it. He moved in and fixed things up for me. He was going to take care of me.

I had my own plans for him: the cowboy boots could stay, but the pants should be Levis and a little longer than his other pants. I had to call a girlfriend from the plant to ask her how to wash polyester; he had to wear these to work. I did talk him into some cotton shirts (before I found out

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they had to be ironed). Western music was okay in moderation, and I found music that crossed over with rock and roll, like Marshall Tucker, Bob Seeger, and Emmylou Harris.

From the beginning, Phil was open to whatever music I listened to or whatever clothes I wanted to wear. Unconcerned with fashion or correctness, he truly accepts people as they are. He is unaware of the packages people come in; he never

*I was living in a flat that was decorated with some of my favorite items: a brass hula girl lamp, three stolen plastic pink flamingos, a few beers and some cheese in the refrigerator, and an electric train set.*

and his accent alone would normally have sent me in the opposite direction. He drank bourbon and coke. I smoked pot. He wouldn't see a Jane Fonda movie. I had been at several demonstrations where she spoke. He listened to Elvis. I listened to the Stones. Phil was a foreman for Ford Motor Co. I assembled trucks on the line.

I MET PHIL when I'd moved back to Michigan to get my life together after it fell apart in San Francisco. My folks were tired of me showing up on their doorstep when life got too crazy for me in San Francisco. I'd done this a few times in the two years after my divorce. They asked my uncle to get me a job at Ford's. This uncle hadn't forgotten the sixties, nor had it slipped his mind that I was one of the leaders of a huge demonstration at Ford World Headquarters during the Vietnam War. He got me a job in one of the toughest plants in Michigan. We made trucks, worked ten hours a day and Saturdays.

This factory was like my purgatory, where I planned to suffer until I had paid for my sins and decided what I wanted to be when I grew up. My family thought that the job would either help me or discourage me from returning home the next time my life went into a skid. They never expected me to end up dating my boss.

I was twenty-seven, but was a teenager emotionally. I still believed that the perfect man would come along, adore me, take care of me, and actually move me into a home with a white picket fence and a huge wooden porch with a swing.

The only part of the fairy tale I'd managed so far was a relationship with a gay



ILLUSTRATION BY KAPOL BAPSKÉ

emharrasses me that I believed I was so much better than him.

A few days after he moved into my flat, he went out and bought a matching bathroom set; I'd never had one before. The shower curtain matched the cup, toothbrush holder, and even the rugs. I was able to talk him out of the toilet seat cover, but he was disappointed. He wanted to buy things for me. We also got bedroom drapes; he didn't see anything creative or cool about the matching bed sheets I had thumbtacked to the wall. Phil even made a room divider of knickknack shelves. He had all these *Sunset* book ideas on how to improve this great old forties flat. I had

knows if someone is rich, racist, or Romanian. He did tell me early on that he liked long hair, and I told him that I thought he might look cool with his hair longer. This was the first and last suggestion he ever gave me on my appearance.

I didn't give up on him quite as easily. He does wear jeans now, although they are still an inch too short, and I suspect they have polyester in them; they don't seem to fade over the years.

I have even gotten used to the tape measure on his belt. How many wives get the chance to ask their husbands: "Is that a tape measure you're wearing, or are you just glad to see me?" ♦



# Pre-Shrunk

Alice Wirth Gray

**A** FEW WEEKS AGO I was measured by our health maintenance organization. "Fifty-eight inches," said the cheerful woman, writing on her pad.

Now, I am aware I am short and actively shrinking, but no! not that much.

"You mean fifty-nine inches," I yelped. She patiently put me back under the har and ran the marker down to the top of my head again while I stretched my neck and the rest of me all I could. I eased out and she pointed. I could see for myself: fifty-eight inches. Four-foot-ten. Scales may be inaccurate, even in doctors' offices, and weights may vary between breakfast and dinner, but I've never heard of a steel measuring rod having a really off day.

"But," I persisted, "I'm five feet tall."

"Honey," the woman said emphatically, "you NEVER was."

*"But," I persisted, "I'm five feet tall."*

*"Honey," the woman said emphatically, "you NEVER was."*

For the rest of the standard physical, I was agitated. Something was wrong. I was fifty-nine years old, and I could imagine, with my family's heredity of widow's hump and bones that turn to lace, shriveling up an inch before I was seventy. But two inches before age sixty with perfectly decent posture? What was going on?

I'm a reasonably observant person and I'd always "known" I was five feet tall. My health has not been neglected—far from it: people have fussed over me since I was a baby. If they had noticed that I was not anywhere near five feet tall, they would surely have pointed it out to me. In fact, if my mother had known the exact numbers involved here, I would never have heard the end of it. "You're not just short, you're very, very short," she would have said. (While having many excellent qualities, she was not known for her sensitivity.)

So how come I have been able to routinely fill out my medical forms "5 feet" without suffering twinges of guilt?

**M**Y MOTHER was short, although not as short as I. She was barely shorter than my father, who was politely said to be five-foot-four.

My father suffered from being short, I knew it in my heart. He was, however, very different from the stereotypes of short men, who are frequently presented as angry martinets or compulsive showoffs.

He accepted his height. He was greatly admired and even much loved. He was able

to disarm the most frightening bigot by use of reason and the strength of his convictions. Men who can cause a dramatic change in another person's behavior, without threats, are rare.

But he was SHORT. The one time I saw him lose his temper was in a heat wave in Philadelphia, when, at the end of his rope, he made a wrong turn onto a one-way street and was cussed out by the infuriated driver of a big-rig. I thought he might be killed. I know my father would have liked to have been big enough to have the choice of doing the other guy physical damage even if he opted for peace. In any event, the trucker must have felt my father was too little to punch out or that it was too hot to make the effort.

One of my mother's favorite stories was about the time my father was lifted right up in the middle of Don the Beachcomber's and laid across the table by a tall, female friend of hers, who tickled him until he had to let go of the check. When Mother told this story—with unseemly relish, I thought—my insides squirmed. I hadn't yet read Freud, but it was not the sort of thing I would do to any man, even if I were not short. I mentioned it to a psychoanalyst years later, and he stared at me in horror: "Do you think your father enjoyed that?" I replied with certainty: no.

Therefore, it's clear to me that if Mother had known I was under five feet, she would have taken every opportunity to mention it. Obviously, she didn't know.

How come she didn't know?

**W**HEN I TRY to fathom how I came to believe firmly in something that later turned out to be wrong, I usually blame it on the school I went to. It was, for the most part, a nurturing and progressive institution, but it was not beyond manipulation or even deceit.

Today it's hard to imagine a school that would have the time or wherewithal to develop a coherent policy with regard to its students. Most schools now are on the defensive, trying to protect their administra-

tors, teachers, even the building, from assaults by the students, their parents, the community, and random lunatics.

But in the forties, the staff might plot out a specific course of action for each child. Sometimes, for reasons opaque to me, they would seem to take a monolithic dislike to some child, often with dire results. When my grammar school principal and teachers washed their hands of one vulnerable boy, his family packed him off, overnight, to a military academy, providing him with a near-death experience. But that's another story.

It made me think, however, that by neglecting to announce my exact height, the school might have been shielding me from a blow to my self-esteem and from hurtful teasing. I would have been miserable always being called "Shorty." Maybe in my case the deceit was benign. And perhaps in my case it worked.

Had I ever actually measured myself and read my real height with my own eyes? No, never. Why would I? I knew how tall I was: five feet. But *how* did I know it?

I've just about concluded it was the school's sweet-natured doctor who, on her own hook, did this thoughtful thing for me. She wasn't much of a diagnostician. In the two big cases she was presented with during my thirteen years at the school—scarlet fever in an heiress and appendicitis in a merely rich girl—she failed to recognize either ailment.

Now that I think of it, I'm sure I remember her answer when I asked her directly, "How tall am I?"

"Oh, about five feet."

**D**ID SHE KNOW what she was doing for me with that "about"? Because it made all the difference. I know my quite conventional sense of the fitting-and-proper and of the ludicrous. I know if she had told me I was a short little person and would never escape the four-foot-something rap, I would have thought of myself as peculiarly subnormal all my life. And when I met the man who's been my husband these past forty years, I would not have dared consider him a possible spouse. The difference in our heights would have been too silly and embarrassing. People have made enough annoying remarks as it is: "There go Mutt and Jeff." "Why do the little ones get all the big men?"

Before I got serious about this man, I asked him how tall he was, and was heartened to hear, "Just a little over six-two." With that answer, I could reassure myself there was only about a foot of difference

between us. A foot wasn't so bad. Just a little more than an octave, so to speak, not the half-yard it has now turned out to be.

I told myself, "He must be about the same size as Uncle Richard."

Uncle Richard was my "tall" uncle, miles taller than anyone else in the family. More than that, Uncle Richard was wonderful—elegant in gesture and handsome as a hussar. He taught me to dance (insofar as I do) by letting me stand on his feet while he waltzed me effortlessly around. Floating gracefully on the instep of Uncle Richard's shoes was an absolute thrill.

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So it must be okay for this new guy to be almost six-three, I reasoned. I could hold my head up and not be deterred by odd glances. (These days, when my husband and I try the "slow dancing" of our teens, my nose pokes him just above the navel, looking sufficiently absurd to prevent many public demonstrations.)

The tall and short of it is: the school doctor allowed me to marry a tall man.

**M**Y DEAR UNCLE Richard died recently, and a few weeks after his funeral, I talked with my nephew.

"Auntie," he cried, "do you know how tall he was?!"

That threw me. I had never put a number to it, but I started making mental comparisons and came up with the probability that, because he had been about as tall as my husband, he must have been a little over six-foot-two, and that's what I told my nephew.

My nephew responded, "That's exactly what I would have said. That's what we all thought, but it wasn't so. Nowhere near."

"What ever do you mean?" I asked. (If you're going to question ancient, accepted, mathematically proven facts, you have to present evidence, even if you are my nephew.)

"Because Great Aunt insisted I try on some of his clothes—she said it broke her heart having them in the closet—and I did, and not *just* the jackets, the TROUSERS fit perfectly, and I'm only five-nine!"

I told my nephew that this dumb-founded me, too, and I'd have to think about it. And I have. I guess Uncle Richard must have been about six-two. Myself, I'm about five feet. ♦





# Death at the Ranch

Mim Locke

IT IS OBVIOUS in retrospect that none of us knew how long it would take for a rooster to drown. Most of us had converged on the ranch from the city or suburbs and didn't know much about roosters, or drowning for that matter.

Because of Ellen's knack for ridding herself of qualified hired help, we freeloaders had ample opportunity to exhibit our lack of ranch know-how. Our ineptitude, however, was often masked by the alarming state of disorder that prevailed at Four Mile Ranch.

Most equipment, if it ran at all, clattered about in an advanced state of jury-rig. Pieces of knotted hay-twine stood in for errant bolts, and splintered wooden crates for driver's seats. Machines and vehicles had had their parts swapped and traded so many times that they all came to resemble each other, like members of an inbred clan.

There was an endless amount and variety of work to be done and never any direction as to how to do it. If any one of us naively ventured to ask Ellen for instructions, her response more often than not was to throw up her hands in disgust, shoulder us brusquely out of the way, and take up the task herself.

So we worked hard at figuring out things on our own, and whenever we could get away with it, we hid our mistakes by blaming them on the livestock or the weather or any other thing that couldn't speak up for itself. Like the time Leslie crashed the front-loader of the Allis-Chalmers through the bottom two rails of the main corral fence and blamed it on a docile bull named Lorenzo. Fortunately, Ellen never questioned what had excited Lorenzo to such an uncharacteristic act of vandalism. Nor did she seem to wonder why the boards were busied *into*, not *out of*, the corral.

ON THE DAY of the rooster incident, Ellen had driven into Sheridan for supplies. Not only did she consider a trip to town to be a great waste of time, but exposure to the outside world seemed to awaken in her a keen sense of her own incompetence. It heightened her awareness of how poorly she managed the ranch and frequently prompted her to propose drastic solutions, such as, "I should just be taken out and shot!"

Naturally, we did not look forward to her return, and by early afternoon even the least motivated of us was gripped with an uncontrollable urge to repair a piece of weakened fence down at the Turf Place or to drive up to the south pasture to check on the salt licks.

Apparently, this exodus had not yet occurred when I retrieved the floating rooster from the stock tank and ran with its limp, dripping body to the house, for there were six or seven people around to advise on how best to revive the bird.

Before I go on, I feel it necessary to describe just what a beautiful rooster he was. His regal tail of long, iridescent plumes and his impeccably groomed rust-red feathers brushed color and refinement onto an otherwise dusty and sun-bleached canvas. His nobility and grace set him apart from the other yard animals, many of whom bore traces of a minor calamity or two. He was truly a lord among peasants.

His imperious air was further enhanced by the motley appearance of his

harem, which was a flock of factory rejects rescued by Ellen in an act of compassion. At the egg factory, almost every natural feature outside of essential egg-laying apparatus had been bred out of the hens. The few

*Because of Ellen's knack for ridding herself of qualified hired help, we freeloaders had ample opportunity to exhibit our lack of ranch know-how. Our ineptitude, however, was masked by the alarming state of disorder that prevailed at Four Mile Ranch.*

feathers they possessed were perpetually gray and ragged, giving them a half-plucked appearance. Nevertheless, our chanticleer took pride in parading around his wretched little herd and servicing them regularly. And

they did lay particularly delicious eggs. It is even possible, considering the degraded state of the chickens, that his contribution was essential to the production of such high-quality eggs.

SO YOU CAN well imagine how concerned we were when we found him near death. There wasn't one of us who didn't wish to stem the tide of fury that would inevitably sweep over us when Ellen returned from town.

With a combination of terror and inspired determination, we immediately launched into a series of lifesaving maneuvers. First we spanked the soggy fowl like a newborn baby, holding him aloft by his feet while several hands whomped him on the back.

When we were assured that no more water remained in his lungs, we carried him into the bathroom and wrapped his lice-ridden body in a half-dozen clean towels. Next we lay the bundled bird on the floor, where some of us pumped vigorously up and down on him in hopes of reversing the effects of a possible cardiac arrest, while others slapped and rubbed his feet.

None of these activities brought about any obvious indications of revival. The rooster remained lifeless.

In the confusion of the moment, and through the mists of time, I cannot remember who it was that performed the last desperate measure. But one fearless soul—certainly not myself—knelt down, took the lax and gaping beak in her mouth, and, blowing repeatedly into it as if inflating a balloon, began to administer mouth-to-beak resuscitation. It was at that precise moment that Ellen tromped into the house.

The front door was directly opposite the bathroom, affording Ellen an unob-

*The few feathers they possessed were perpetually gray and ragged, giving them a half-plucked appearance. Nevertheless, our chanticleer took pride in parading around his wretched little herd and servicing them regularly.*

structed view of the proceedings. There was a pause as she took in the scene before her. Very possibly her first thought, upon seeing us all kneeling in a circle on the bathroom floor, was that we were performing some sort of hippie ritual. But she must have soon spied the rooster's head, for she began to laugh.

NOW, I KNOW that up to this time I have portrayed Ellen as a terror, and she could be. But don't get me wrong. She was a very unpredictable person, and we could never be certain how she would react to something. All we knew was that her reaction would be genuine and memorable. Her laughter was as potent as her rage.

"That's got to be the gosh-darn funniest thing I ever saw," she sputtered. "If that poor 'ol rooster hadna been plum dead before you started in rescuin' it, you sure as hell woulda killed it!" ♦

## Honorable Mention Poetry

### School Bus Driver

your exhaustion  
making its way  
up the steps  
I can hear it in the kitchen  
a sack of potatoes  
wrapping around your legs

on the table  
a daffodil  
its yellow O mouth  
teacup mouth  
with tiny pink bells  
of heather

you will tell me  
how many accidents you almost  
had today  
and how the gas mask helps  
with the fumes  
but 200 buses warming up  
in the morning  
is still a thick cloud  
of dead fish  
tightening around your head

in the sink  
are the edges  
of yesterday's spaghetti dinner  
and a thousand teacups  
bouncing on the water  
I could begin by dividing the plates  
from the cups  
or turn on some reggae  
to make the kitchen dance  
you back into your feet

you will tell me  
about this place  
at the bottom of your spine  
where all the sitting has gathered  
like a fist  
and if I could hug you  
hard enough  
your back would sigh  
open  
like the daffodil's mouth

the cats are meeting you  
at the top of the steps  
habitually scratching their  
front paws  
into the carpet  
and as you walk into the kitchen  
they hurry to their dish  
hoping maybe tonight  
they'll get fed first

you are reaching  
for the bag of tortilla chips  
as you tell me about the boy  
who throws up every morning  
on your bus  
and how he carries his own  
plastic bag  
with him

you are sitting on the blue couch  
watching the news  
and when the phone rings  
you're not home  
"do you know what it's like when  
your food starts to taste like diesel?"  
you say

I bring two glasses of spring water  
and put them on a red placemat  
on the coffee table

you tell me  
about the mother with sad eyes  
meeting her son at the bus stop  
how she tells you she hasn't had  
a vacation  
since he was born  
and even the teachers can't keep  
the trouble out of him

the cats are slinking  
into the remnants of afternoon sun  
moving from one pillow to another  
until the heat is gone  
and our laps will do

you tell me  
how you made a penny  
come out of the little girl's ear  
and she said  
"when I grow up I want to be a bus  
driver—  
just like you."

Susan Dambroff



# Today My Friend

David Bolle

**T**ODAY, MY FRIEND, a leaf fell on me. Missed my head by inches, landed instead on my shoulder, tumbled down the front of my sweatshirt, and by the time it reached my waist it left me. Blew away beside me, then behind me, continued its descent without me. I looked back for it, but it was already indistinguishable from the other dead leaves on the sidewalk.

Its ascent came earlier. Quite remarkable. There, through a square cut in the sidewalk, a tree grew. It sucked up minerals and nutrients from earth that had not seen the sun for decades. A hundred years ago this area was a cattle ranch. A cow pasture. Grass grew. Weeds. Wildflowers. Bees and butterflies. Birds. Then the rancher subdivided this section, laid out streets nice and straight, blocks rectangular and regular. The first houses were disparate, scattered, with breathing room and growing things between them. Then, just like on a Monopoly board, the number of houses grew—a couple on this street, then on that street, then, becoming constrained, they arrayed themselves into neat rows and columns. Standing so close that they touch each other.

Dirt roads evolved into rocky lanes,

then were paved, ripped up as city services were added, widened and bordered with sidewalks that ate up front yards. Finally, holes were punched in the sidewalks to let the trees out. Trees up, leaves down, and one landed on me.

It didn't make me feel the same way I did when the bird got me. I was at a theme park, making my way from one land to another. Of course without ever setting foot on soil. Park is really a misnomer. The only growing flora were poking up through holes in the concrete that covered the acres of themes, carefully ensconced behind decorative fences. To keep the fauna out. Only one species, *Homo sapiens*, has the run of this range.

But the sky is another matter. Our avian friends wheel and dive through the air, riding the invisible currents, rising to heights and swooping down. A few occasionally leave us tokens of their passing.

Mine was deposited on my shoulder, where my son had been riding only a little while before. A white badge of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. It excited me as much as any ride I went on that day. My heart raced, and for a few minutes I was totally focused on the experience. I no

ticed the people who noticed me as I made my way, bobbing and weaving, through the crowd to a bathroom where I washed off the damned spot. I imagined the despair, disgust, and humiliation I would have felt if it had been only a few inches different and landed on my head.

But, truthfully, it was just an intellectual disturbance. An emotional disturbance. Not a real physical disturbance. Furthermore, it was years ago.

**T**ODAY, MY FRIEND, I went to the Farmer's Market. It was Hot Pepper Day. The market is held in the middle of the Embarcadero, a wide waterfront street that used to be overshadowed by the Embarcadero Freeway, before the earthquake cracked and twisted it, made some of it fall down, and caused the rest to be torn down. Now it's three lanes in each direction, and in-between them are parking lots.

They rope off a section of parking lot, and farmers set up their stands and sell their produce. Since it was Hot Pepper Day they had a special stand by the entrance with a long table set up with samples of all the varieties of peppers, cool at one end and so hot at the other that the people cutting the peppers were wearing plastic gloves.

I took a toothpick and started working my way through the sweet green and orange and purple peppers, continuing with the hotter ones—the striped Hungarians, the serranos, and jalapeños—and heading eventually for the crown prince of peppers, the habañero. The peppers at the hot end of the table were so hot that it took a few minutes to clear my palate, dry my tears, and get ready for the next bite.

The line of pepper tasters pretty much petered out where the hot ones started, but

there were a few people moving past, so I took time out between bites by walking around the corner of the tent to savor the taste and tears, and to look at the clouds that were thick and dark over the bay while my mouth calmed down.

As I turned and walked back to the stand, a woman got conked on the head by the gate to the parking lot. The long yellow and black diagonally striped board that swings up when you take your ticket and dive in, and that swings up again when you pay the fee on your way out, had somehow gotten up, and when a woman walked

*Then it started to rain, and yes, the rain landed on my head. It splashed on my glasses. I flipped up the hood of my sweatshirt and, getting soaked, went to find the farmer with the habañeros. Most other people were huddling under the farmers' tents, but I could stand the sky falling on me.*

through, it came down and beamed her. As soon as it made contact it went back up, and the people with the surprised woman gathered around her and walked away with her. They all touched her. Those of us watching were then surprised when it suddenly came down again and conked another woman on the head. It knocked her glasses askew. Her friends also gathered around and touched her. Then the gate came down and stayed down.

How can one be prepared for such a thing? It made me think of Chicken Little. You either don't worry about it, or walk around paranoid, looking up all the time because something might fall on you—a hit of freeway, a hit of tree, of bird, of sky.

Then it started to rain, and yes, the rain landed on my head. It splashed on my glasses. I flipped up the hood of my sweatshirt and, getting soaked, went to find the farmer with the habañeros. Most other people were huddling under the farmers' tents, but I could stand the sky falling on me.

**T**ODAY MY FRIEND DIED. I was at home and the phone rang. As usual I let the machine get it. I heard another friend say that if anyone was home to please pick up, but I couldn't. So he went on and announced that our friend had died at about 6:30. After a few minutes' timeout, I was able to call him back, we said the words, we asked how we were doing, and we agreed to talk tomorrow.

It was expected. AIDS ate him. He slipped away gently and with grace, in the presence of his lover and his parents, with his friends gathered around him. I am sure they touched him.

The thing is, he won't be around anymore. He won't come visit, or be there to phone. He won't paint anymore. He won't laugh. How could he have seen the sky falling?

The farmer had sold out of habañeros.





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**The view from Spinelli's** - Lily the haund surveys 24th Street as her humans Anastacia Nemec (left) and Elizabeth Zbytniewski become benchmarks of the Valley morning.

Phata by Beverly Tharp

Special Advertising Section

August 1995



# *The Noe Valley Voice*

THE COMMUNITY NEWSPAPER OF NOE VALLEY - ALWAYS DISTRIBUTED FREE - SINCE 1977

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And if you want to grab a latte, make it a decaf.

PS: The regular news, columns, features and advertising return to these pages in September.

## *The Price of a Literate Valley*

*The Noe Valley Voice* thanks its loyal advertisers for sponsoring this special edition with its focus on creative writing and reading. Their dollars have made it possible for us to reward and honor processes that are finding less favor in the political and social climate of the larger city and state.

Publishing the *Voice* has been for 19 years a joint effort between editors and advertisers who, though they may not always agree with what is printed, nevertheless think it important that this means of communication continue. As *Voice* editors, we work toward high standards of journalism and design so that we can justify the faith placed in us by our neighbors who pay the bills.

From those of us at the keyboards to those of you behind the counters and cash registers we offer our sincere thanks for helping this work see the light of day.

— Jack Tipple, Sarah Smith, Steve Steinberg





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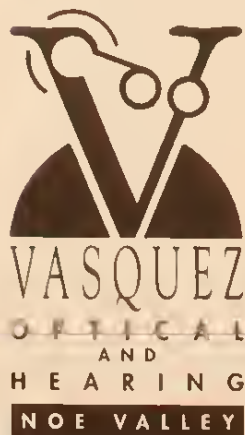
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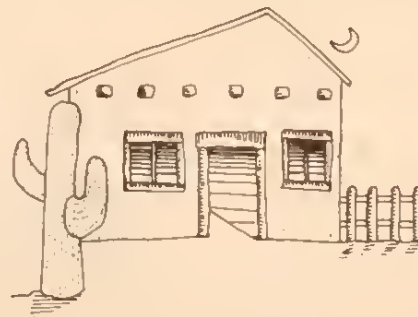
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and

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M&M's will, for every customer who  
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A pause in the spring rains allowed the setting sun to outline the spires of St. Paul's Church and mountains of cloud. Photo by Najib Joe Hokim

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**CLASSIC NOE VALLEY UNITS \$540,000** Four charming, spacious & bright one bedroom units. Featuring hardwood floors, remodeled kitchens & baths, decks, 3 car garage and wonderful landscaped garden. Ms. Taggart/Ms. Hemingway ext 300/308



**GLEN PARK \$425,000** Fabulous bright remodeled view home. Combines wonderful architectural detail for the past w/stunning contemporary design. 3br/2.5ba, 2 woodburning fireplaces, sunny view deck & walk-out garden. Ms. Kirkham ext 297



**PRIME NOE VALLEY HOME \$439,000** Spacious & solid Edwardian home with abundant period detail combined with a modern well equipped kitchen. Sunny rear deck & magical landscaped garden. 2 car garage w/plenty of storage. Ms. Taggart/Ms. Hemingway ext 300/308



**OWNER SAYS SELL! \$379,000** Price reduced! Dramatic, Spacious, Pano Vu Townhouse. 3br, family rm, dining rm, 2.5 ba, fabulous \$70,000 remodel. Pano downtown views, decks, garden patio. Garage. Mr. Brown ext 225



**GARDENER'S DREAM \$335,000** Noe Valley Condo, spacious, bright semi-detached Queen-Anne Victorian. The upper level has been renovated & features fabulous Victorian details combined with a gourmet kitchen & remodeled bath, enchanting south garden. Ms. Taggart/Ms. Hemingway ext 300/308



**UPPER MARKET \$329,000** Nice Italianate units. Upper has panoramic views, 1 car garage. Mr. Tom ext 279

1699 Van Ness Avenue

**474-1750**

San Francisco, CA 94109



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*A Place to Love, Grow and Excel*

When St. Paul's Elementary School first opened its doors 80 years ago, Noe Valley was an immigrant working class community very different from today. But then as now, families wanted the best education possible for their sons and daughters.

Today, St. Paul's Elementary School offers an exceptional Catholic education in a nurturing, inclusive environment of energy and enthusiasm. The excellent student to teacher ratio (25:1) ensures that each student receives the educational, emotional and physical care they need and deserve.



Year after year, the school's high percentage of graduates receiving scholarship assistance testifies to the success of this child-centric educational philosophy. Graduates from St. Paul's attend the following high schools: Riordan, Immaculate Conception Academy, St. Ignatius, Lowell, Mercy, Sacred Heart Cathedral, University, Convent of the Sacred Heart, Wallenberg and Lick-Wilmerding.

To learn more about St. Paul's Elementary School, we invite you to contact our principal, Sr. Ann Cronin, BVM, at 648-2055.

**ST. PAUL'S ELEMENTARY SCHOOL**  
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ALL IT TAKES  
IS A NEW  
COAT OF PAINT  
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BEAUTIFUL  
VASE...

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Are you searching for a church to call your own?  
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Life? Death? Suffering? Hope? Forgiveness?  
Love? God?

Sessions exploring these issues in relation  
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**SAINT PAUL'S PARISH**  
**221 VALLEY STREET**

Call Mary Tan.  
648-7538





**Got Irish Soda Bread?** Too long a wait for the J-Church streetcar can turn one's thoughts to snacking, especially if you're at the stop in front of Star Bakery.  
Photo by Beverly Thorp

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clothing • furniture, etc.  
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BREAKFAST SERVED ALL DAY!

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Try our Fruit Pancakes and Waffles • Omelettes are our Specialty

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International Vegetarian Cuisine, Organic Coffees, Fine Teas

Fabulous Weekend Brunch

Take-out available

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50% OFF second entree of equal or lesser value with this ad

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**EARLY BIRD SPECIAL**  
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**25% OFF ENTREES**

**LUNCH—New menu daily**

Monday-Friday 11:30-4pm

**DINNER**

Nightly 5pm-10pm

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Take-out Available & We use no MSG

Lunch entrees from \$3.95 served with soup and rice

Open for Lunch

Manday - Saturday 11 - 3

Serving Dinner

Manday - Thursday 11 - 9:15

Friday - Saturday 11 - 10

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1500 Church Street (AT 27TH) ☎ 282-0919





**Summer color** brightens the sidewalk on Church Street.

Photo by Beverly Tharp

## Janet Moyer Landscaping

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And for those of you who've overloaded on all this **good literature**, stop by and try one of our many domestic or imported beers on tap.

Life is worth living again—**football season** is almost here. Come watch the games with us on one of our **7 TVs**.

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Weekend Brunch Saturday and Sunday 9 am–2 pm

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**After Mass, there's nothing like a quick run** on top of the low walls outside St. Paul's Church, even if you're wearing your Sunday best. Aren't you glad Dad porked a couple of blocks away?  
 Photo by Beverly Tharp

## CHURCH STREET NEIGHBORS



**You've got the attitude...  
 Now get the look!**

No matter how physical, tough or grueling your workout is, you'll still look sensational in an outfit from In-Training Sportswear. Choose from a huge selection of styles and colors for men and women. Come and save with our terrific everyday low prices on leading aerobic, running, dance and cross training apparel from...

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Freshly brewed coffee, espresso  
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Open 7:00 am-9:00 pm Mon.-Sat.  
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*4128 TWENTY-FOURTH STREET SAN FRANCISCO, CA 94114 415-550-1300*





**Twenty-third Street is quiet** as the sun casts long shadows on an early evening jogger and his best friend.

Photo by Ed Buryn

## THE TOP OF 24TH STREET

**BACCO**  
RISTORANTE ITALIANO

737 Diamond Street  
(between 24th & Elizabeth streets)

282-4969



**Party Trays and Gift Baskets**  
*We send Gift Baskets & Gourmet Food Items anywhere*

**ANDIAMO**  
a gourmet deli

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**HOMEMADE ITALIAN AND  
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*Take it home and just heat & eat*



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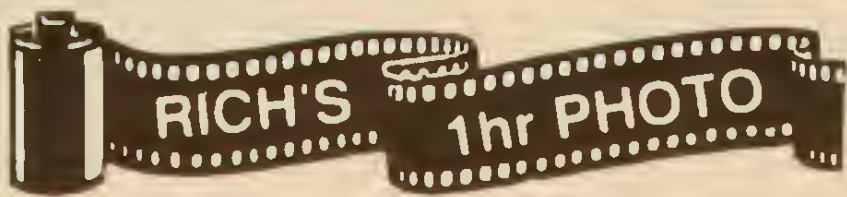
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**40,000 Mile Limited Tread Wear Warranty**

155 SR13..... \$36.99	185/70 SR14..... \$42.99
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*Photo by Beverly Tharp*



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**3 HOUR SERVICE**  
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Rice Dream Beverage  
32 oz. - reg 1.69 **\$1.29**

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Safflower Mayonnaise  
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Organic Salsas  
Roasted Garlic • Sundried Tomato  
Black Bean  
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Organic Fat Free Pasta Sauces  
all flavors  
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**Garden of Eatin'**  
Organic Blue Corn Chips  
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Monday - Saturday  
9:00 am - 8:00 pm  
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**We Accept**

ATM Cards  
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**Free Parking**  
Across the Street  
In our Very Own  
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**ATM**

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So Smog it Here and SAVE MONEY!

**WE  
SAVE  
YOU**



**\$16<sup>95</sup>**

Plus \$7 Certificate

Reg.  
**\$27.50** Plus Certificate



**DAN'S SMOG & AUTO SERVICE**  
**3865-24th St. 282-1552**

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AT

**Hair Play**

**SALON FOR MEN AND WOMEN**  
**OUR DYNAMIC NEW COLORIST AND CUTTING TEAM**  
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**Haircuts only \$24 • NEW CLIENTS ONLY**

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**LIMITED OFFERS**

**ALSO COMING SOON**

**The opening of our retail store, offering professional**  
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**TUES•WED•SAT•SUN 10-6 PM MON•THURS•FRI 12-8 PM**  
**1599 DOLORES ST. (AT 29TH ST.) 550-1656**

**RUDY PAUL**  
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*Custom Jewelry*

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LAY-A-WAYS WELCOME

**Rudy Paul Jewelers**  
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in the Noe Valley Mall  
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## EDITOR'S CHOICE

### Exposure!

Advertise today in  
the *Noe Valley Voice*  
(display ads only)

**239-1114**



**Lunch  
and  
Dinner**



**PASTA • VEAL • CHICKEN • STEAK • SEAFOOD**

**NEW! OLO MACDONALD** Marinated Chicken, Fresh Garlic, Onions,  
Mushrooms and Tomatoes.....\$11.15.....\$14.05.....\$17.45.....\$21.35

**NEW! CLEOPATRA** Grilled Eggplant, Sun-dried Tomatoes,  
Fresh Garlic, Feta Cheese (Your choice of Pesto Sauce or Tomato  
Sauce).....\$11.15.....\$14.05.....\$17.45.....\$21.35

**NEW! JOLLY GREEN GIANT** Broccoli, Zucchini, Fresh Garlic, Onions,  
Mushrooms and Tomatoes.....\$11.15.....\$14.05.....\$17.45.....\$21.35

**SPECIALS!**

### LUNCH SPECIALS

From 11:30 am (Served all day)

Pizza by the Slice .....\$2.00  
Each additional item......50  
Mini Salad.....2.00  
1/2 order Spaghetti.....4.00  
1/2 order Ravioli.....5.00  
Side of Fresh Vegetables.3.25  
Large French Fries .....1.75

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**WITH 3 OR MORE TOPPINGS**

Please mention ad when calling with this coupon.

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**COMPLETE DINNERS FOR TWO,**  
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Applies to every two members of your party.  
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**1** and **2** Plastic Bottles are the **ONLY** plastics recyclable in San Francisco's Curbside & Apartment Recycling Program.

### REMEMBER:

- Look for **1** or **2** recycling symbol on bottom
- Must be a bottle (neck smaller than base)
- No automotive products or pesticides

### IMPORTANT!

- Remove Caps
- Rinse
- **Please Flatten!**



### WE CANNOT ACCEPT:

- Plastic Bags
- Jars and Tubs (Margarine, Yogurt)
- Motor Oil Bottles
- Toys
- Plastic Caps and Lids
- Medical Supplies
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**San Francisco**  
**RECYCLING**  
**PROGRAM**

For a Blue Bin or Curbside Information Call: 330-CURB  
Recycling Program Hotline: 554-6193

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Offer Good Through October 15, 1995 Must Present Ad.

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West Coast Family Services  
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San Francisco, CA 94131

# KID FRIENDLY

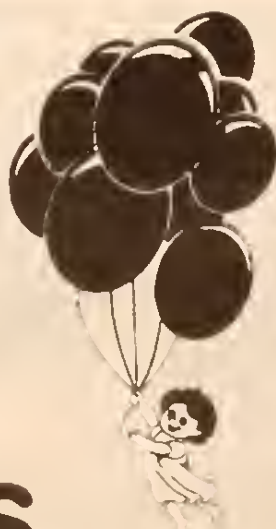
## Small Frys wants to remind Parents not to forget to IMMUNIZE your kids.

The American Academy of Pediatrics reminds you to protect your kids from diseases like polio, whooping cough and measles and mumps and Hepatitis B with regular immunizations. These diseases are still around and they can hurt your kids.

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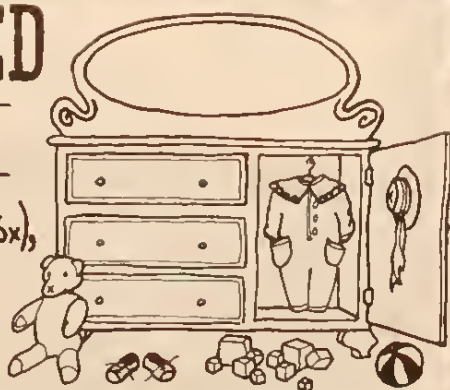
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## Openings in 4th & 5th grades for Fall 1995

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- Credentialed Teachers
- Parent Participation
- Field Trips

*Progressive Supportive Challenging  
Educational Environment*

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San Francisco 94114





**Biker boys** Zack Knox (left) and Janathan Zonugo pose during a pause on this summer's day cruise of Noe Valley.

Photo by Beverly Thorp

## NOE VALLEY KIDS

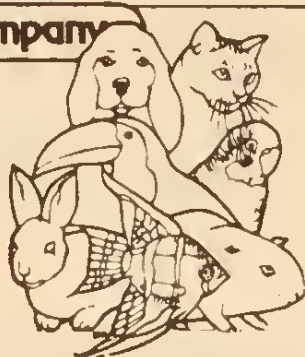
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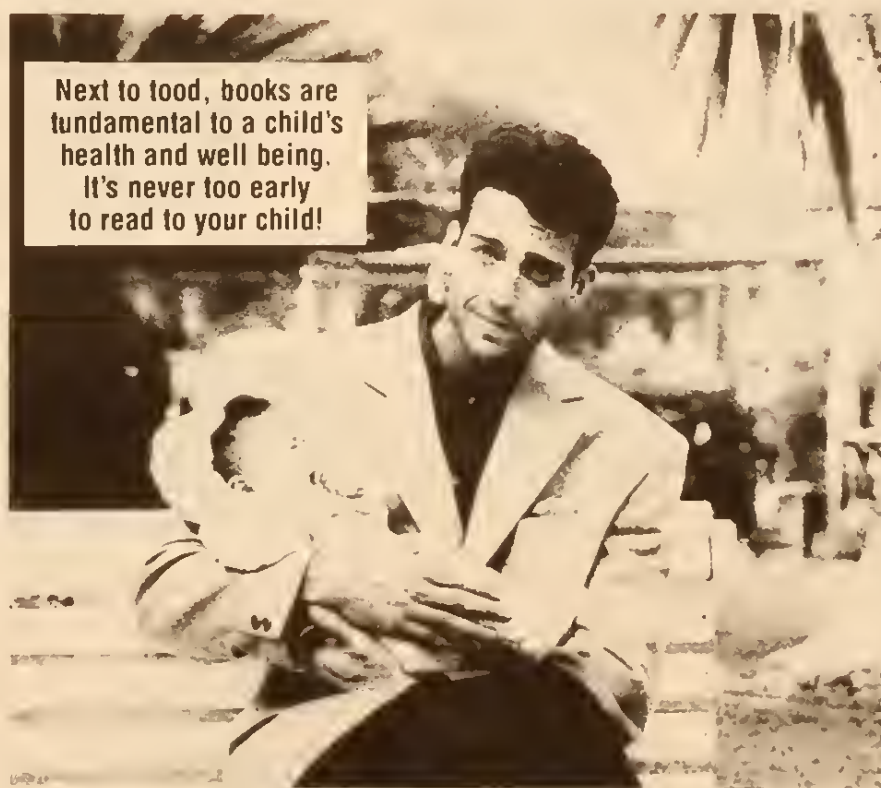


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THRIFTY PHARMACISTS TAKE PRIDE IN PROVIDING THE BEST PROFESSIONAL PRESCRIPTION SERVICE

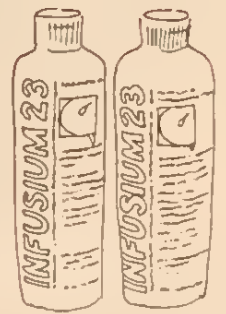
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Your choice of shampoos, conditioners or hair treatments in assorted formulas. 16 oz.



**\$6<sup>19</sup>** EA.

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Blends away gray in just 5 minutes. Your choice of shades

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### DEXATRIM

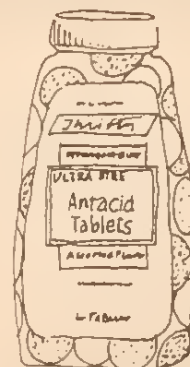
With Vitamins 28 ct., Maximum Strength Caffeine Free, with Vitamin C, or Extended Duration 20 ct.

**\$5<sup>99</sup>** PK.



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### THRIFTY CALCIUM ANTACID



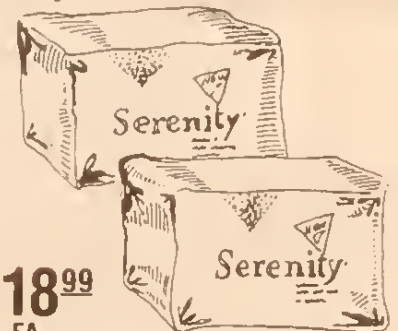
150 Regular, 96 Extra-Strength or 72 Ultra tablets. For fast relief of stomach indigestion.

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Feminine bladder control protection. Choice of Regular, Super or Super Plus. 24-36 guards.



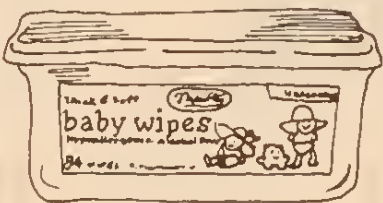
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**\$2<sup>79</sup>** EA.

84 Scented, Unscented or Unscented Natural, or 160 Clean Up Wipes.

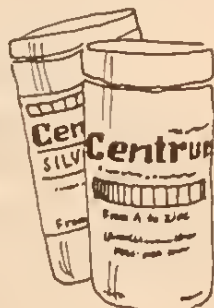


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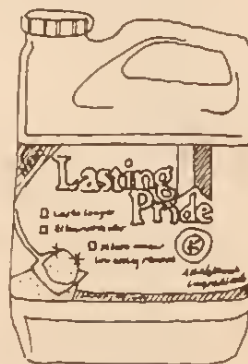
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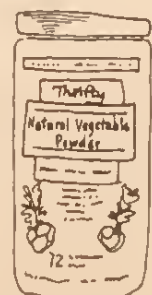
**\$4<sup>49</sup>** EA.

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### NATURAL VEGETABLE POWDER

72 dose size in sugar or sugar-free. Regular, Orange or Citrus flavors.

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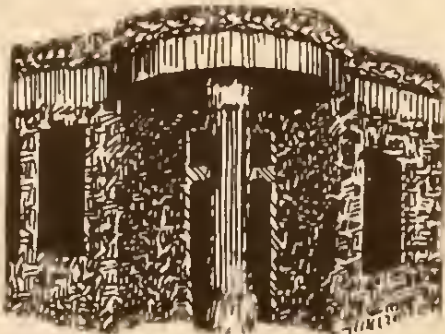
The year was 1957 when Al Woldow took his Leica along on a ride above Noe Valley in his private plane, and took this shot. Are there any present day pilots that could help the Voice update this view? Photo from the Noe Valley Archives at the Noe Valley - Solly Brunn Library, courtesy of Poul Kontus

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# NOE VALLEY SERVICES



*It's a long, long way from the top of 27th Street to downtown San Francisco. Let's just stay home and enjoy the view. They do deliver The Noe Valley Voice up here, don't they?*

*Photo by Najib Joe Hakim*

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# NOE VALLEY SERVICES



On the Noe side of the hill, a lone pedestrian crosses Castro Street.

Photo by Ed Buryn

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# THE LAST PAGE



**And where did you go on your summer vacation?** These Noe Valley pigeons flocked to Venice where they paused to picnic in front of the Basilica San Marco using their hometown rag as a table cloth.

Photo by Charles (Birdman) Kennard